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## UNIT 3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE EPICS\*

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, students are expected to know the following:

- Philosophy and Literature: Darśana and *Sahitya*
- Epics as *Mahākāvya*: Definition and Variety
- An overview of the Major *Mahākāvyas*
- An overview of The *Mahābhārata* and The *Bhagavad-Gīta*
- An overview of The *Rāmāyaṇa*
- Philosophical Imprint of the Epics.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Philosophy, in its original sense, denotes a quest for a vision that captures the essence of the world as a whole. In Greek antiquity, ‘*sophia*’ and ‘*philo*’ together meant the love of wisdom and the result as vision was described as ‘*kosmotheoria*’. German philosophers called this synoptic vision ‘*weltanschauung*’ or simply a world-view. The same enterprise is called Darśana in Indian philosophical parlance. Now, this vision would also include its narrative in the form of literature. Many philosophers and literary theorists, from West as well as East, have contended that both the disciplines should not be seen in isolation. They converge at many points and thereby being complementary and supplementary to each other. Philosophy devoid of concrete illustration from the historic world is blind and historicity without any philosophy is empty and dry.

The above point is most evident when we analyze a particular genre of poetry (or in general of literature) known as *epic*. The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. Around the eighteenth century, it was extended to mean a grand and heroic form. Accordingly, Miller

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Williams defined epic as a long narrative told on a grand scale of time and place, featuring a larger than life protagonist and heroic action. In India this sense of epic has existed since thousands of years ago. In Indian context, the epics may be denoted by *laukika sāhitya* (folk literature) or *Mahākāvya* (the great poems). In this unit, we will understand the basis of such division of literature and a detailed reflection on the contents, themes, and philosophy of the first two great epics of India out of the following:

1. Hindu Epics
  - i. The *Mahābhārata*
  - ii. The *Rāmayaṇa*
  - iii. Epics of Kālidāsa
2. Buddhists Epics of Ashvagoṣa
3. Jaina Epics

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## 3.2 AN OVERVIEW

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Before we delve deep into the contents, themes, and philosophy of major Indian epics, we need to construct a basic understanding of *kāvya* in Sanskrit literature. The word '*kāvya*' has been described in many ways by various philosophers yet the universal consensus is that the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. It also involves aesthetic sensitivity. Accordingly, all the genres of Sanskrit literature of great importance would come under *kāvya*.

**Kāvya** is further divided into two kinds

### 1. Śravya Kāvya –

It is that which is linguistic, can be communicated verbally either through reading or perceiving. It would include genres like *padya* (poetry), *gadya* (prose) and *champu* (a mixture of *gadya* and *padya*). Further *gadya kāvya* is divided into *kathā* (story) and *akhyāyikā* (narratives). Finally, *padya kāvya* is divided in *Mahākāvya*, *khaṇḍakāvya* and *muktaka kāvya*. The last division is based on the volume of the content.

### 2. Dṛśya Kāvya –

It goes beyond the verbal communication as it involves communication of *rasa* through the characters. It might focus on their dress, gestures, curves, designs, actions, drama, and other fine arts. It also essentially involves visual metaphors (*rūpaka*).

## Origin and Development of Kāvya/ Mahākāvya

*Kāvya*s in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of Ṛgveda. Usha Sukta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in *Brāhamaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kāvya* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its

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proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha, Śriharṣa, etc. In this unit, we shall explore the insights of the first two *Mahākāvya*.

**Characteristics of *Mahākāvya* –**

Ancient Indian scholars, like Bhamaha, author of *Agnipurana*, Dandi, Hemchandra, Vishvanatha, have attempted to formulate some essential characteristics in great detail. Among them, Dandi’s description of a *Mahākāvya* is most fascinating and universally accepted. Dandi, in his book *Kavyadarsha*, mentions that an Epic should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*aśīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdeśātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.

Its protagonist should be of high moral caliber like patience, wisdom, courage, piety, etc. and should belong to a descent lineage. Protagonists can be one or many but have to be from the same or higher lineage. It should be structured in cantos (*sarga*), i.e., in different sections. The number of cantos must be at least eight and in every canto, only one particular kind of meter (*chand*) of the verses must be employed. The only exceptions are the last few verses, which can have slight modifications in their *chand*.

Furthermore, a *Mahākāvya* must exhibit either *śringāra rasa* (adornment) or *vīra rasa* (courage) or *śānta rasa* (peace) as the primary rasa the remaining two as secondary rasa. It must portray a harmonious picture of the four *puruṣārthadharma* (righteousness) *artha* (wealth) *kāma* (sensuous pleasure) and *Mokṣa* (ultimate Bliss as liberation). In addition, it must also vividly describe some common themes such as city, village, ocean, mountains, sunset, sunrise, garden, water-play, marriage, union and separation, child-birth, war, etc.

From the above characteristics, it is clearly evident that the *Mahākāvya*s were not just for the sake of literary scholarship, but they had specific philosophical leanings. The idea of salutation in the beginning (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), development of moral character, exhibition of life in its myriad form, the goal of life as *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*, are some of the essential philosophical underpinnings of Epics or *Mahākāvya*. In the following sections, we shall delve deep into these philosophical notions after providing a brief sketch of the *Mahākāvya*s, viz., the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the meaning and characteristics of epic and *Mahākāvya*?

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2. Briefly sketch the origin and development of *Mahākāvya*?

### 3.3 REFLECTION ON THE CORE ISSUES

Sanskrit literature can be broadly divided into two parts- *vedika* and *laukika*. *Vedika sāhitya* pertains to the transcendental philosophical matters. It includes *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*. It is also called *śabda pramāṇa*. *Laukika sāhitya* pertains to the worldly subject matter. Common people have direct access to them and which in turn influences their day-to-day activities of private and public sphere. The first *kavi* of *vedic sāhitya* was *Brahmā* while the first *kavi* of *laukika sāhitya* is the sage *Vālmīki*. *Vālmīki* is therefore known as the *adi kavi*. *Ādi* means the first and the great both.

#### 1. *The Rāmāyaṇa*

As indicated above the parameters of being the first and the great both justify the title of *Vālmīki* as *ādi* when we analyze his great epic work ‘the *Rāmāyaṇa*’. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru- The story of the epic is a part of the texture of the lives of our people. In its praise A.A. Macdonell also writes – Probably no work of world literature, secular in origin, has ever produced such a profound influence on the life and thought of people as the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

#### The Texture of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Though *Rāmāyaṇa* is so widely popular in India, that a detailed narration would be repeated yet we need to briefly grasp the texture of this Epic. Etymologically ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’ comes from the two Sanskrit words – *Rāma* and *āyaṇa* meaning the path or place of *Rāma*. It is the grand and heroic journey of prince *Rāma*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains 24000 verses (*ślokas*) divided into seven chapters or cantos, namely, *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, *Sundarkāṇḍa*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, and *Uttarakāṇḍa*. A brief summary of these chapters is as follows:

#### 1. *Bālakāṇḍa*

As the name suggests, it describes how the prince *Rāma* and his brother-*Lakṣmaṇa*, *Bharat*, and *Śatrughna*, are born; how they are sent to *Gurukul* – the ancient Vedic school and how they learn various arts such as archery, politics, ethics, daily rituals, etc.

#### 2. *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

The plot of the second chapter is the city palace of *Ayodhya*, when the four princes return to their palace; *Rāma* is set to inherit the throne. He also gets married to *Sīta* by breaking *Shiva*’s bow. But due to the envy of *Mantharā*, *Ram* is made to relinquish his title and go to exile with his wife and brother *Lakṣmaṇa*.

### **3. Aranyakāṇḍa**

It describes Rāma's early exile years in the forest and eventually during which many important events take place displaying the righteousness and courage of Rāma, Sīta, and Lakṣmaṇa. The chapter culminates with the abduction of Sīta by Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā.

### **4. Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa**

The story progresses in the forest called Kiṣkindhā in southern India where Rāma meets his devoted allies like Hanumāna, Sugrīva, and Jāmvanta. The plan to bring back Sīta is set.

### **5. Sunderkāṇḍa**

It describes Rāma's journey to Laṅkā, It is sunder or beautiful in terms of lyrics, the praise of Hanuman and his army, and the joy of Sīta. It is also recited today in India in isolation from *Rāmāyaṇa*.

### **6. Yuddhakāṇḍa**

As the name suggests, it describes how the story culminates in a war between Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's army. Eventually, Rāvaṇa is killed and Sīta is rescued.

### **7. Uttarakāṇḍa**

The last chapter is on the life of Rāma having returned to Ayodhyā after exile. It also includes the banishment of Sīta, the birth of two sons, Lava and Kuśa, absorption of Sīta in the holy Earth, and the ascent of Rāma to the Heaven.

## **Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Rāmāyaṇa***

### **1. Rasas**

*Rasa* means the sense of joy that arises when one encounters an epic or any piece of art and literature. These are the seat of emotions in the human soul. The *pradhāna rasa* (primary emotion) of *Rāmāyaṇa* is *karuṇa rasa* (grief and compassion). This epic begins and dissolves in the same *rasa*. *Śringāra rasa* (romance) is seen in union, separation, and reunion of Rāma and Sīta. *Vīra rasa* (courage) is also exhibited mainly in the Yuddhakanda. *Hāsyā rasa* is evident as in the case of Śurpanakhā. *Raudra* (fury) is also seen in Rāvaṇa, *adbhuta* (extraordinary) in Hanumāna, and *śānta* (peace) in the characters of many sages.

### **2. Characters of Morality**

In this Epic, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kauśalyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother, and Sīta the ideal wife.

### **3. Human-centric**

In *Rāmāyaṇa* the divine attributes are situated in human form. The divine here

descends in the characters who are normal people of a kingdom. It shows that the divine qualities can be imbibed by human beings also. Such an approach of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is unparalleled in the history of Sanskrit literature. Thus, the spirit of *Rāmāyaṇa* has a humanist dimension as well.

#### 4. *Puruṣārtha* and *Āśrama*

*Puruṣārtha* is the central notion of Indian philosophy and morality. Etymologically, it is derived from the two Sanskrit words, *puruṣa* and *artha*, meaning the purpose of human beings. They are four as *dharma* (righteousness or duty), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (sensuous fulfillment), and *Mokṣa* (liberation). The epic does not eulogize *artha* and *kāma* but it does not dismiss it as well. They are suggested to be fulfilled within the limits of *dharma*. The primary importance is given to the *dharma* aspect as epitomized in the character of Rāma, Hanumāna, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa. *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts the victory of *dharma* over *adharmā*. The epic does not describe much about *Mokṣa* but again does not dismiss its importance.

*Āśramas* are also the founding pillars of *Sanātana dharma*. Though all the *āśramas* are described in the epic but the central focus has been on the *grhastha āśrama dharma* which we find in Rāma's management of his kingdom and family affairs.

#### 5. Metaphoric Suggestions

Besides moral and aesthetic importance, saints and philosophers down the ages have tried to derive a suggested meaning (metaphor) of the story of *Rāmāyaṇa*. For instance, Vivekananda interprets it in an Advaitic sense where Rāma is seen as the Supreme *Brahman*, Sīta is seen as *jīvātmā* (the individual soul), and Laṅkā is illustrated as a human body. The *jīvātma* which is engaged in the body of Laṅkā always desires to meet her Supreme Lord (*Brahman*). The only hindrance is that of *rākṣasas* or our evil character traits. Vibhīṣaṇa represents the *sattva guṇa* (auspicious qualities), Rāvaṇa represents the *rajoguṇa* or our ego, and Kumbhakarāṇa represents the *tamoguṇa* or the inertia. Hanumāna is seen as the guru or the vital force of *jīva* by which the soul remembers God and God in turn comes and saves the *jīvātman* by killing the ego of Rāvaṇa.

#### 2. *The Mahābhārata*

The second great epic (*Mahākāvya*) after the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Mahābhārata*, which literally denotes a battle name that took place in Kurukṣetra some 5000 years ago. If the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *adi kāvya* of Sanskrit then *Mahābhārata* is the first historical epic (*itihāsa kāvya*) of India. According to 'The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism', the *Mahābhārata* is the longest epic or text in the history of mankind. It contains over one lakh *ślokas* (verses) and over 1.8 million words and is roughly ten times the length of *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. Scholars like WJ Johnson have also compared it with the Bible, the Quran and the works of Homer and Shakespeare. In Indian tradition, it is also called the fifth *Veda* or *viśva kośa* (the treasure of world knowledge).

#### Texture of the *Mahābhārata*

As stated above, the *Mahābhārata* consists of over one lakh *ślokas*. It was composed by Vyasa with the help of god Gaṇeśa. In its chapters, it contains

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stories within stories. Further, it is composed of 18 *parvas* (books) and then further sub-*parvas* (or sub-chapters), viz., as follows:

1. **Ādi Parva** – As the name suggests, it delineates the origin of the *Mahābhārata*, the race of Bharat, and Bhṛgu.
2. **Sabhā Parva** – It depicts the life of the court of Indraprastha, the yajña (sacrifice) of Yudhiṣṭhira, the game of dice, disrobing of Draupadī and the exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
3. **Vana Parva** – It describes the twelve years of exile of the Pāṇḍavas.
4. **Virāṭa Parva** – It describes the incognito lives of the Pāṇḍavas at the court of Virāṭa.
5. **Udyoga Parva** – ‘*Ugdyoga*’ means efforts and here it signifies the attempts and efforts made to avoid war between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.
6. **Bhīṣma Parva** – Herein commences the great battle and it describes the heroic performance of Bhīṣma in the battlefield and eventually his fall on the bed of arrows. This *parva* also contains the world famous *Bhagavad-Gīta* - the Song of the Lord.
7. **Droṇa Parva** – It describes the performance and death of Droṇācārya at the battlefield including other martyrs.
8. **Karṇa Parva** – It describes the heroic performance of Karṇa, the son of Kuntī.
9. **Śalya Parva** – It depicts the last day of the battle as Śalya being the Commander in chief. It also described the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana which ended the war.
10. **Sauptika Parva** – It describes how Aśvathāmā, Kṛpā, and Kṛtavarmā kill the remaining Pāṇḍava’s army during their sleep leaving only seven warriors on the Pāṇḍavas and three on the side of Kauravas.
11. **Strī Parva** – It depicts the lamenting of Gāndhārī who curses Kṛṣṇa for the destruction of Kauravas.
12. **Śānti Parva** – It depicts the coronation of Bhīṣma.
13. **Anuśāsana Parva** – It includes the final commands or instructions (*anuśāsana*) given to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma.
14. **Aśvamedhika Parva** – It describes the *aśvamedha* yajña of Yudhiṣṭhira, the conquests of Arjuna and the speech of *Anu-Gīta* by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna.
15. **Āśramavāsika Parva** – It describes the death of Dhritarashtra, Kunti, and Gandhari in a Himalayan hermitage.
16. **Mausala Parva** – It describes the materialization of Gāndhārī’s curse with the destruction of Kṛṣṇa’s race of Yādavas/Yaduvaṅśa.
17. **Mahāprasthānika Parva** – It describes the great journey of the Padavas and Draupadi towards the Himalayas.

**18. Svargārohaṇa Parva** – It describes the ultimate ascent of the Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven).

In addition to these 18 parvas, there is a chapter named Harivaṁsa Parva as an appendage, which describes the life of Kṛṣṇa, not covering the eighteen chapters.

### Philosophical Underpinnings of the *Mahābhārata*

Again, *Mahābhārata* is not just a story for a recreational purpose; rather it is a great narrative or epic on fundamental philosophical issues of *Sanātana Dharma*. Some of the philosophical foundations can be explained as follows:

#### 1. *Puruṣārtha*

The meaning and importance of *Puruṣārtha* has been already stated above. The *Mahābhārata* also portrays characters who exhibit excellence in *Puruṣārtha*, for instance, in the life Karna, Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, Bhīṣma, etc. Yudhiṣṭhira is also portrayed as dharmarāja, i.e., the king (guardian) of Dharma. The ascent of Pāṇḍavas to *svarga* (heaven) highlights the importance of *Mokṣa* as the final aim of life.

#### 2. Law of *Karma*

Numerous stories of the *Mahābhārata* also illustrate the importance and efficacy of the law of Karma, which simply says what is sowed, is reaped. It is the application of causality in the realm of action. For instance, Duryodhana and Kauravas have to pay for their wrong deed of disrobing Draupadi in the battlefield and when Bhīma kills Duryodhana. Great *ācāryas* also, who take the side of immorality, like Bhīṣma, also had to pay as per their *karma*. The law of Karma also supervenes the god-head authorities such as Kṛṣṇa who is cursed by Gāndhāri and eventually his race of Yadavas is devastated. Thus, the law of karma is the sole regulator of the entire narrative of the *Mahābhārata*.

#### 3. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* and its Philosophy

The full-fledged philosophy of the times of the *Mahābhārata* is encapsulated in the *Bhagavad-Gīta* or the song of the Lord dispensed to Arjuna in the battlefield in the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahābhārata*. It is composed of 700 verses divided into eighteen chapters.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the major scriptures of Vedānta, and all its seeds can be found in it. For instance, Adī Śaṅkarācārya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaiṣṇavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak derive the importance of *niṣkāma karma* (selfless action) from it. Some scholars like Gandhi and Vivekananda have derived the philosophy of *samanvaya yoga* from it, i.e., the path of harmony of action driven by pure knowledge and surrender to God.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* also institutionalizes the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*. When Arjuna is reluctant to fight in the battlefield or was inclined to take the path renunciation, Kṛṣṇa teaches him the path action rather than renunciation. The path of renunciation was contrary to his *svadharma*

(intrinsic nature) as he was a warrior (*kṣatriya*). Kṛṣṇa emphatically says that to die in one's *svadharma* is greater than to live with the *dharma* of someone else.

Hence, the *Bhagavad-Gīta* presents a synoptic picture of the philosophy of *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and *Purāṇas* through the words of Śri Kṛṣṇa.

#### **4. Metaphoric Suggestions**

Philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi have contended that the battle of *Mahābhārata* never took place historically. It is merely an allegory given by Vyasa who wanted to preach certain core messages of Hinduism, like self-less action based on *varṇa* and *āśrama* systems. For Gandhi, the *Mahābhārata* is the state of mind of each and every individual. Kauravas are the negative forces and Pāṇḍavas the *sātvic* (positive) forces. The chariot of Kṛṣṇa also symbolizes the human condition where Arjuna is the *jīvātmana*, horses are the *indriyas* (sense organs) and Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer is the Supreme Lord. The state of dilemma posed by Arjuna is the state of mind of every individual and the path of happiness is following one's *svadharma*. Gandhi, however, also emphasized the futility of violence as the war of the *Mahābhārata* did not bring peace but only remorse and regret. However, at the same time he adores the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa as wisdom and deeply appreciated the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. In his own words-

“The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. However, that peace and joy come not to a skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind.”

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### **3.4 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE**

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Philosophy of Epics (*Mahākāvya*) and the Indian culture and life are intimately connected. People might not be well versed in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* in scholastic terms yet their life's basic principles reflect the philosophical teachings of these epics. Often the epics like *Rāmāyaṇa* have been reformulated into vernacular languages. One such example is Tulsīdās's *Rāmacaritamānasa* which have moved the hearts and sentiments of millions of people. The following is a summative account of the philosophical response and the influences of the two great epics of India:

#### **1. Genesis of Epic (*Mahākāvya*)**

Scholars have deciphered the genesis of epics in *karuṇa rasa* (compassion and piety). For instance, when Vālmīki saw the death of a bird while it was engaged in love and the subsequent lamenting of the alive bird, his heart was filled with compassion and grief. He spontaneously uttered a verse which was lyrical, metrical, and full of poetic skills. Afterwards, Brahmā himself suggested him to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* – as the first epic. Hence, a great poetry is sprouted only in a certain state of agony, as Valmiki himself says – ‘*śokaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ*’. Kālidāsa has also accepted this view when he says, ‘*yasya śokaḥ śloka-tvamāpadyata*’.

## 2. The quest for Beatifism/Bliss

Another purpose of the epics, as already stated, is to evoke certain *rasas* in human beings. Epics or Indian philosophy in general are teleological in nature where it seeks the highest spiritual pleasure and a permanent release from suffering. In this respect, epics begin with the primary *rasas* such *karuṇa*, *vātsalya*, *śringāra*, etc. but it can also culminate in the highest pleasures like *bhāgvada ānanda* through the path of *bhakti*. Rasa are, therefore, also called *brahmānanda sahodara* (the twin of the Supreme Bliss).

## 3. Varṇāśrama and Purushartha

The epics have also supported unanimously a social structure based on *varṇa*, viz., *Brāhmin*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *sūdra*; and on *āśrama*, viz., *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sanyāsa*. These are the important constituents and stages of a normal human life. Furthermore, during these stages, what one has to achieve is nothing but the four ends of human beings –*puruṣārtha*, viz., *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *Mokṣa*. These elements have shaped the course of Indian philosophy, for instance, as in Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta philosophy.

## 4. Dharma and Adharma

Another core message of the epics is to proclaim the victory of morality (*dharma*) over immorality (*adharma*), and thereby preaching humanity to adhere to the course of *dharma* only; the epics unanimously proclaim *yato dharmah tato jaya*, i.e., where there is *dharma*, there is victory. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, this is observed when Rāma kills Rāvaṇa and with the coronation of Rāma and Vibhīṣaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, the same trend is observed with the victory of Pāṇḍavas over Kaurava and with the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira.

## 5. The Bhagavad-Gīta and its Influence on Indian Philosophy

In praise of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, a German philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt once quoted, “The most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue ... perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show.” The same is true regarding its influence in Indian philosophy in general and Vedānta in particular. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is one of the *prasthāna trayi* (three great sources) of Vedānta. All the schools of Vedānta, be it *kevalādvaita* of Śaṅkara, *viśiṣṭādvaita* of Rāmānuja, or *dvaita* of Madhva, all claim their systems to be faithfully derived from the *Bhagavad-Gīta*.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Comment on the characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as moral ideals.

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2. Describe briefly the philosophy of *Bhagvad Gīta*.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

We have observed how Indian *kāvya* culminated in the *Mahākāvya* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. We have also seen how they both are grand and heroic not only in terms of its volume and poetic qualities but also regarding its philosophical texture. *Rāmāyaṇa* has one protagonist, i.e., Rāma but *Mahābhārata* has many like Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and Yudhiṣṭhira. However, all of them portray an ideal character such as having courage, wisdom, devotion, etc. Ultimately, there turns out to be a victory of *dharma* over *adharma*. The chief significance of the epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* lies in the sense that it propagates the deep, abstract and sometimes harsh truth of philosophy as sugarcoated by poetry which is easily accessible to and imbibed by a common person.

### 3.6 KEY WORDS

<b>Kāvya</b>	: Poetry in ancient India with highly Sanskrit literary skills.
<b>Mahākāvya</b>	: Great poetry of ancient India with great Sanskrit skills and voluminous in size.
<b>Chanda/Chhanda</b>	: It is a kind of quatrain (four stanza) used in the poetic tradition of ancient India.
<b>Rasa</b>	: Rasa is a kind joy or sense of beauty evoked by encountering any piece of art or literature.
<b>Beatifism</b>	: The view that maximizing spiritual pleasure/happiness is the supreme goal of life.
<b>Vedānta</b>	: It represents the teaching based on <i>prasthāntraya</i> , the three great sources (texts), namely, the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , the <i>Bhagavad-Gīta</i> , and the <i>Brahmasūtra</i> .
<b>Teleology</b>	: Explanation of a thing based on <i>telos</i> , i.e., purpose or end.
<b>Puruṣārtha</b>	: It means the virtues or duties of human beings. They are four- <i>dharma</i> (duty), <i>artha</i> (wealth), <i>kāma</i> (pleasures), and <i>Mokṣa</i> (liberation).

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### 3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The term epic is derived from the Greek and Latin words like ‘*epikos*’ and ‘*epicus*’ respectively meaning – a tale, story, prophecy, proverb or poetry in a large form. *Kāvya* is the creation of a poet (*kavi*) is *kāvya* (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*) and it must be able to evoke a certain *rasa* (joy) in the heart of the perceiver or reader. *Kāvya*, in its grand form, is called *Mahākāvya* and it has characteristics as it should commence in a bliss dispensing tone (*aśīrvādātmaka*), a mood of submission to the Divine (*namaskārātmaka*) and should hint at the subject matter (*vastunirdeśātmaka*). Its plot (*kathānaka*) should not be purely fictitious but based on the ancient historic records or on *Purāṇa* tradition.
2. *Kāvya*s in Sanskrit literature originate in the earliest poetic hymns (*sūkta*) of the Ṛgveda. Uṣā Sūkta is an excellent example of Vedic *kāvya*. In the later developments of *Vedas*, as in *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* also, *kavyas* were scattered in poetic and dialogue form. Hence, the seeds of *kāvya* or *Mahākāvya* were present but not fully germinated. Epic as a *Mahākāvya* in its proper sense begins with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki and the *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa. Later on, the tradition was carried forward by authors like Ashvaghosa, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Maagha, Sriharsha, etc.

#### Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The term ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’ comes from the two Sanskrit words – ‘*rama*’ and ‘*ayana*’ meaning the path or the place of Rāma. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, various characters contain the epitome of particular aspects of morality. The author wants to install them in the common masses. Rāma is the character of the

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highest moral order (*maryādā puruṣottama*). Daśaratha epitomizes a fatherly love. Kauśalyā and Sumitrā display the patience and love of motherly nature. Sumanta is the ideal minister and Mantharā is the ideal faithful servant. Hanumāna is the ideal devotee, Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother, and Sīta the ideal wife.

2. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* encapsulates the philosophy of the times of *Mahābhārata*. It has the philosophy of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti yoga*. Adi Shankaracharya has derived the path of Knowledge (*jñāna*) from it. Vaishnavite scholars like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Vallabha have derived the importance of *bhakti* or the path of devotion from it. Scholars like Tilak have derived the importance of *niškāma karma* (selfless action) from it. It also contains the philosophy of social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama dhama*.



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