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Mahabharata and Ramayana



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महाभारत

Mahabharata

The Epic Age of Hinduism

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MAHABHARATA

Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two great epics of India, have captivated the hearts of its people for several millennia.

- Whether it is literature – both Sanskrit and vernacular arts, crafts, painting, music, dance, and drama, or temple motifs, no aspect of Indian culture has escaped the stamp of their influence.
- The simple village folk who shed tears while listening to the ballads on the banishment of Sita or the highly skilled artisans working on the temple motifs depicting the Kuruksetra war, are both responding to a dynamic and continue culture of these epics.

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➤ Hindu tradition has always considered these two epics as **itihasa** (verily did it exist thus) or history.

➤ Modern scholars have largely conceded that the core of the epics could have had a historical basis.


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Date

The *Mahabharata* is an important source of information on the development of Hinduism between 400 BCE and 200 CE and is regarded by Hindus as both a text about dharma (Hindu moral law) and a history (*itihasa*, literally “that’s what happened”).

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Author



- Krishna Dvaipayana also known as Vyasa or Ved Vyasa is the author of Mahabharata. He was a central and revered sage who is also credited for writing several significant scriptures.
- Vyasa is grandfather of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Vyasa is also a character in the legend/poem

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➤ He was a contemporary of the grandsire Bhishma and had a firsthand knowledge of most of the events described in the epic.

➤ Research scholars feel that the original work called **Jaya**, written by Vyasa to commemorate the victory of the Pandava princes over the wicked Kauravas, might have been a much smaller work comprising about 8800 verses.

➤ This was subsequently revised and enlarged into **Bharata**, a work of 24000 verses, by Vaisampayana, a disciple of Vyasa, and recited during the Sarpayaga (serpent sacrifice) of Janamejaya, the great grandson of the Pandava hero Arjuna.

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➤ The final edition that has come down to us is the work of Suta Ugrasravas, son of Lomaharsana (also spelt as Romaharsana), and was recited at the Sattrayaga (a kind of sacrifice, the performance of which is spread over several years) of the sage Saunaka in the Naimisa forest.

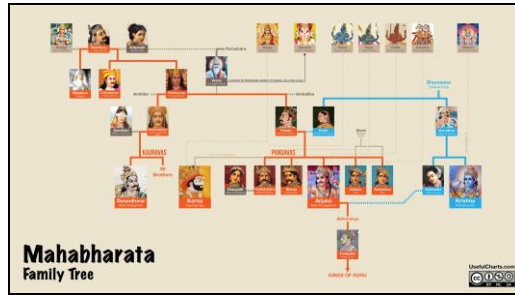
➤ It is this that has been called **Mahabharata**, due to the immense size and its dealing with the story of the people of the race descended from the ancient emperor Bharata, culminating in the war.

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Summary

- Appearing in its present form about 400 CE, the *Mahabharata* consists of a mass of mythological and didactic material arranged around a central heroic narrative that tells of the struggle for sovereignty between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas (sons of Dhritarashtra, the descendant of Kuru) and the Pandavas (sons of Pandu).
- The Mahabharata relates the Great War between the cousins Kauravas and Pandavas. This event occurred during the eighth incarnation of **Lord Vishnu**

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Part of Hindu Psyche

- "The fabric of Hindu culture is woven with characters and values from these two epics. Among all heroes, Rama and Krishna are highly respected and worshipped by Indian people with loving hearts. Both epics were repeated by people with devotion years after years. Stories of heroes from these two epics were retold thousands of time for character building of children in home and schools. Almost all Indian people believe the incidents described in epics did actually happen in prehistoric times."

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Mahabharata - The Longest Poem Ever Written

- "The word Mahabharata comprises the syllables 'maha', 'bha', 'ra' and 'ta'. 'Maha', of course, means great; 'bha', 'ra' and 'ta' stand for, respectively, 'bhava', 'rasa' and 'tala', the three attributes of dance.
- Mahabharata, the word, is thus an expression for the great dance – the Cosmic Dance of Shiva – and as personification, the Great Dancer, Lord Shiva Himself."

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- > This edition is reputed to be 'Satasahasri Samhita,' a collection of 100,000 verses, though the extant text contains less.
- > The round figure is obviously an approximation.

The ancient Hindu epic is ten times the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey combined.

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ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS

The contents of the 18 major chapters may be briefly summarized as follows:

- > Adiparva
- > Sabhaparva
- > Vanparva/Aranyaparva
- > Viratparva
- > Udyogaparva
- > Bhismaparva
- > Dronaparva
- > Karnaparya
- > Salyaparva
- > Saupitikaparva
- > Striparva
- > Santiparva
- > Anusasanikaparva
- > Asvamedhikaparva
- > Asramavasikaparva
- > Mausalarparva
- > Mahaparasthanika
- > Svargarohana Parvas

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Bhagavad Gita the most famous... "the Song of God" most famous

- Dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna
- Arjuna presents his arguments for refusing to fight. Basically, he fears the sinful reactions of killing. But after Arjuna surrenders to Lord Krishna and requests the Lord to instruct him, the Lord begins countering Arjuna's objections.
- First, Krishna analytically explains that fighting in His service is transcendental and will bring no sinful reaction.
- Krishna also explains the Vedas' purpose as to gradually elevate souls to Krishna consciousness. Krishna thus encourages Arjuna to remain fixed in His service – fight – and ignore his mind's desires.

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Bhagavad Gita the most famous

- As Krishna's explanations why Arjuna should fight were only a summary, and since Krishna glorifies both 'buddhi-yoga', intelligence used in spiritual advancement of knowledge (2.45, 2.49-50), and 'karma' work (2.47-48, 2.50), Arjuna becomes confused and wishes to use Krishna's instruction to perform 'buddhi-yoga' as an excuse to retire the battlefield for a life of contemplation.
- Arjuna therefore opens Chapter Three asking Krishna why He is encouraging fighting if intelligence is better than fruitive work.
- Krishna then explains 'karma-yoga', reaction-free devotional work, and clears up Arjuna's mistaken idea that all work is fruitive and leads to bondage. Krishna explains that Arjuna should fight, for avoiding sinful reactions though devotional work is better than attempting to escape reactions though renouncing work.
- Krishna also instructs Arjuna to fight to set the proper example of duty. Krishna therefore tells Arjuna to fight, but with knowledge and detachment (3.29-30), without falling victim to his own attractions and aversions.

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Bhagavad Gita the most famous...

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Bhagavad Gita the most famous...

- the Lord, in Chapter Four, explain different aspects of transcendental knowledge. First Krishna explains attaining knowledge through the disciplic succession.
- Then after successively explaining His appearance and then His mission, the Lord explains His devotional service as the goal of Krishna had already referred to the importance of performing 'yajna', sacrifice, in 3.9 Krishna next explains the soul's relationship with Him as eternal His part and parcel, which one must approach a bonafide spiritual master to learn.
- Chapter Four ends with Krishna glorifying transcendental knowledge and requesting Arjuna to arm himself with this knowledge - which burns all sinful reactions to ashes - and fight!

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RECENSIONS AND COMMENTARIES

- Different regions of India have preserved different recensions of the text of this epic.
- These have been broadly classified as the Northern and the Southern recensions.
- Scholars opine that the latter which is the longer of the two is more impressive because of its precision and schematization as also its practical outlook.
- One of the standard editions published contains 95,826 slokas or versus in 18 'parvans' or books, with 107 sub-parvans and 2111 chapters in all, including the appendix.

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- Considered the greatest spiritual epic of all time, the Mahabharata takes the reader on a marvelous and unforgettable journey to wonderful places and encounters with sages, heroes, warrior kings, and other colorful personalities.
- The Mahabharata is unique because the epic also delivers profound lessons about every aspect of life.

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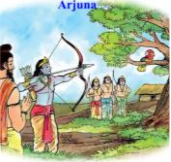
- The story's central plot is about the dynastic struggle for the throne of Hastinapura, the kingdom ruled by the Kuru clan.
- The story begins when the blindness of Dhritarashtra, the elder of two princes, causes him to be passed over in favour of his brother Pandu as king on their father's death.
- A curse prevents Pandu from fathering children, however, and his wife Kunti asks the gods to father children in Pandu's name.

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As a result, the god Dharma fathers Yudhishtira, the Wind fathers Bhima, Indra fathers Arjuna, and the Ashvins (twins) father Nakula and Sahadeva (also twins; born to Pandu's second wife, Madri).

One of the major characters in Mahabharata is Arjuna, one of the five sons of Pandu. Arjuna, considered a demigod, was born when Indra, the God of rain, blessed Kunti and Pandu with a son.

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Arjuna

The struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas culminates in the great battle of Kurukshetra. Shortly before the battle, Arjuna shows signs of insecurity and doubts about the fight's outcome, which will lead to the deaths of many worthy people, including his relatives.

- However, Lord Krishna convinces Arjuna to take part in the battle, explaining his duty as a warrior and a prince and setting out to him the various philosophical systems. The decisive battle of Kurukshetra ends with the total destruction of all the Kauravas. The five Pandavas, including Lord Krishna, are victorious.

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The Mahabharata ends with the death of Lord Krishna and the subsequent end of his dynasty and ascent of the Pandava brothers to heaven. This event marks the beginning of the Hindu age of Kali Yuga, the fourth and final age of humankind.

According to Hindu beliefs, we live in the yuga of "Kali," the Goddess of Destruction.

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• It cannot be denied that the Mahabharata is filled with stories about violence, deceit, bloodshed, war, abduction, injustice, greed, and lust. So, how can this epic be considered a spiritual masterpiece?

• One of the reasons the Mahabharata is a sacred text is because of Lord Krishna's presence, but there is also much more this incredible literary work has to offer.

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• According to the author Diwaker Ikshīt Srivastava, "all the strengths and weaknesses of human nature – valour and chivalry, cunning and deceit, daring and romance, lust and greed, righteousness and depravity – are woven into this intricate and fast-moving panoramic tale that has enthralled listeners for well over five millennia .

• The Mahabharata, for Hindus, is no fable; it is the pinnacle of human thought and understanding. This remarkable poem, which appears mythical in character, is the verbal expression of the direct experience by the sage Vyasa, of the ultimate truth – of Lord Shiva the Primordial Creator and of His illusion – the Dance of Shiva, His dance of death, the evolution of a new creation.

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• The Mahabharata is the story of life. The purpose of life is to experience the divine mystery that is life: the majesty and glory expressed in the infinite forms of creation, our position in this cosmic order and the eventual realisation of our own divinity.

• Life is God's bounty, a gift that must be lived and enjoyed – with gratitude.

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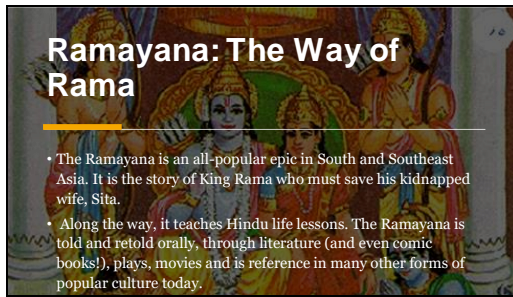
• The Mahabharata is about life and living, the here and now, and covers the five stages of human life: Bal Avastha (living with our parents – experiencing God in our parents), Brahmacharya (living with a guru – experiencing God in our guru), Grihastha Ashram (living with society at large – experiencing God in every human being), Vana Prastha (living with nature – experiencing God in all nature) and Vairagya (living with self – experiencing God in oneself).

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• The Mahabharata is the most exhaustive exploration ever of the human condition.

• It thus covers passion (Kama) and its exhaustion (Moksha) and the in-between, the wealth of happiness (Artha) and balance or order (Dharma) – the means of its achievement."

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Ramayana: The Way of Rama

• The Ramayana is an all-popular epic in South and Southeast Asia. It is the story of King Rama who must save his kidnapped wife, Sita.

• Along the way, it teaches Hindu life lessons. The Ramayana is told and retold orally, through literature (and even comic books!), plays, movies and is reference in many other forms of popular culture today.

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Ramayana

- Author Valmiki
- Culture Indian
- Language Sanskrit
- Genre epic poetry
- Time: 550 B.C.E (some say 200 B.C.E.)
- Names to know Rama, Sita, Ravana, Hanuman, Dasaratha, Laksmana
- Concept dharma

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Rama

- Rama was the eldest son of the great king Dasharatha.
- The gods had declared that he was born for the specific purpose of defeating the demon-king Ravana. He is considered to be the seventh incarnation of the great god, Vishnu.




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- Rama won the hand of his wife Sita in an archery contest, in which he was the only contender able to bend a bow that had once belonged to Shiva. Sita had been born of a furrow in the earth (this is what her name means). The two were extremely happy together, and returned to live in Rama's home, in Ayodhya.

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- Rama's stepmother, Kaikeyi, wanted to promote her son Bharata as heir to the throne of her husband, Dasharatha; Rama was eldest, and the honor rightly was due him. Kaikeyi called in several favors her husband had promised her, and forced Dasharatha, who could not go back on his promises to his wife—to exile Rama for fourteen years.
- Rama's brother Lakshman and his wife insisted on accompanying him, and they left together. Dasharatha died of grief, and Bharata attempted to persuade his brother to return. Rama, also bound not to go back on his word, refused. Bharata pledged to rule in Rama's name until his return.

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- Rama, Sita, and Lakshman wandered in the forest until Rama was seen by an evil spirit, who fell in love with him.
- Rama rejected her and she attacked with her allies, only to meet defeat at the hands of Lakshman and Rama.
- She appealed to her brother Ravana, the strongest and most dangerous demon on earth at that time, for help. Ravana decided to kidnap Sita, the wife of Rama.

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- One of Ravana's demon followers assumed the form of a splendid deer, who aroused the interest of Sita. She asked Rama to retrieve the deer. Lakshman drew a line or circle around Sita to protect her magically, and went to aid his brother.
- While he and his brother were thus engaged, Ravana came to Sita in the guise of a holy man. Tricking her in this way to cross the protective line, he kidnapped her and took her to his palace on the island of Lanka.

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• Upon returning and finding Sita gone, Rama despaired. Accompanied by his brother, he went in search of her. On the way the two killed a demon whose liberated spirit told them to seek the help of Sugriva, the monkey-king.

• The brothers sought out the king, and helped him to regain control of his kingdom, which had been usurped by his half-brother. In gratitude, Sugriva dedicated his armies and his finest general—Hanuman, the son of the wind—to the quest to retrieve Sita. Hanuman discovered Sita's location and visited her there, reassuring her that Rama would save her. He suggested that a huge bridge to the island be constructed to allow the siege of Lanka.

• After great battles and acts of heroism, the siege was completed and Ravana defeated. Sita was rescued.

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• Many versions of the Ramayana end thus with return of Sita and Rama to their kingdom after fourteen years of exile, and the commencement of Ram Rajya, the glorious time of the rule of Ram. Other versions, such as that by Valmiki, end with the questioning of Sita's loyalty during the time of her kidnapping, when she spent so much time in another man's home.

• In such versions, Sita returned to her husband only to be put to a fire test to prove her loyalty. She passed this test, only to be questioned again later. She was then banished with her two unborn twin sons. Later asked to return to the kingdom, she did so only to stand before the assembly, calling on the earth (from which she was born) to take her back again if she had remained pure. The story ends with her absorption into her mother, the earth, and her ultimate vindication.


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Narrative Structure

• Book 1 an account of Rama's childhood this is an addition to the original text which frames the central narrative. It introduces Rama as a divine incarnation, an avatar of Vishnu.

• Books 2-6 form the core of the epic Rama as a wandering hero avenging bride theft. Monster-slayer.

• Book 7 an addition that completes the story of Rama as an avatar. The suffering of Sita.



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• Themes: the nature of heroism / Hero's journey

• Gender roles

• Natural social hierarchies Caste

• How to live a good life (according to dharma right action, sacred duty according to ones social role, status, and gender)

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The God Vishnu

• One part of Hindu trinity


• Positive Qualities

- Loves Man
- Selfless

• Powers

- Creates, Preserves Destroys

• Protector of dharma



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Moral Exemplars

• The poem has had powerful effects on peoples behavior in South Asia.

• Rama, Sita, Laksmana have been held up as models of behavior.

• Public performances revolve around the questions:

- Why did Rama do this/that?
- Was Sita right in doing this/ that?

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Core Story

- Ravana, the 10-headed powerful king of the Raksasas (demons who threaten the world and moral order dharma) has become invincible to gods, demigods, and animals.
- The gods persuade Vishnu, whose function it is to preserve dharmas, to incarnate himself as a man in order to destroy Ravana.

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The Avatars

- Vishnu incarnates as Rama, son of Dasaratha, king of Kosala, and his senior wife Kausalya.
- Rama is a paragon of princely virtues.
- Sons are also born at the same time to lesser wives Kaikeyi bore Bharata, Sumitra bore the twins Lakshmana and Satrugna. These sons all share in Vishnu's divine essence.
- Sita is avatar of Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu
- Sita symbolizes an ideal daughter, wife, mother, and queen

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Rama's Heroism

- Rama's heroism lies in both his acts and his attitude
- A man's fundamental duty to honor his father's word. Rama does this without anger.
- Rama's heroism combines the strong sense of duty and dedication to social responsibility demanded of an ideal king and the ideal member of the structured Hindu social order.
- Gandhi admired Rama as his personal hero and the personification of the ideal man.

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Sita's Heroism

- Her role is focused on her conduct as wife a womans dharma is to obey her husband.
- She is the exemplar of the good wife for Hindu culture, much as Penelope was for Greek culture.
- Women were mens property sexual fidelity to their husbands was the major virtue of women.

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Sita's Troubles

- Still, Valmiki's account implies that Sita's own willful actions - coveting the golden deer and persuading her male relatives to leave her unguarded - led to what happens afterward.
- Her kidnapping and imprisonment, as well as Rama's eventual rejection of her.

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Sita's Revenge

- After Rama slays Ravana and rescues Sita, he asks her to prove her sexual purity with trial by fire.
- She emerges triumphant and the two return home. However, continuing public doubt leads him to banish her to the forest.
- Later, she refuses to rejoin Rama, expressing her anger by committing a kind of ritual suicide.

Cultural Values

- The male authors of Hindu legal and ritual texts wrote that men had to be guardians over women to ensure the legitimacy of the family line.
- A woman's uncontrolled sexuality could bring dishonor and ruin to her family.
- Marriage was arranged soon after puberty, for each menstrual cycle was seen as a lost opportunity for producing a son.
- However, in the epic we do see women such as Sita making choices about their own lives.
- Sita is a heroine in her own right