

the world's epics is so big as Mahābhārata. In size the Mahābhārata is double that of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey put together. The following poem about it is worth mentioning now:

Yathā samudro bhagavan
Yathā ca himavān girih /
Khyātāvubhau ratnanidhī
Tathā bhāratamucyate //

Mahābhārata is not a mere epic. It is a whole literature in itself containing a philosophy which has been an unflinching and perennial source of spiritual strength to the people of India. Above all it has for its core the Gītā which is perhaps the noblest of scriptures.

The Mahābhārata comprises eighteen books, each book being called a Parva. There are 2109 chapters in it, the chapters differing in size. Besides, there is an annexe called Harivaṁśa which deals with the life and history of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

2) *Contents.* The contents of each Parva are succinctly given below: The Parvas are so named as to give a hint of their central theme.

(1) *Ādi Parva.* (Ādi=beginning). Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, king of the Candra dynasty, are brothers. Bhīṣma brought them up. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was born blind and he got a hundred children of his wife Gāndhārī. They were called the Kauravas. Pāṇḍu had two wives Kuntī and Mādrī and got of them five sons called the Pāṇḍavas headed by the eldest Yudhiṣṭhira.

(2) *Sabhā Parva* (Sabhā=court). The Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas lived together in the court at Hastināpura. There, the Kauravas entered into a game of dice with Yudhiṣṭhira and through the deceitful tactics engineered by the keen-witted Śakuni, Yudhiṣṭhira was defeated and he lost everything he possessed. The Pāṇḍavas were then compelled to go into exile to the forests for twelve years and spend another year after that incognito. If they were found out during that period of incognito they were to go into exile for another term of twelve years. The Pāṇḍavas accompanied by Pāñcālī left for the forests.

(3) *Vana Parva* (Vana=forest). This is one of the longest of Parvas and describes the life of the Pāṇḍavas in the forest Kāmyaka. The well known stories 'Nala Carita' and 'Kirātārjuniya' are told in this Parva'.

(4) *Virāṭa Parva.* (Virāṭa=name of a King). The Pāṇḍavas after completing their term of exile in the forests spent the year of their life in incognito at the court of King Virāṭa. Many wonderful events took place during their stay there and this Parva deals in detail about them.

(5) *Bhīṣma Parva* (Bhīṣma=The first Generalissimo of the Kauravas). The great Mahābhārata war was fought in the vast expanse of Kurukṣetra lying to the north-west of Delhi. Bhīṣma was the first generalissimo of the Kauravas and Dhṛṣṭadyumna of the Pāṇḍavas. Vyāsa describes the events of the battle classifying it according to the generalissimos of the Kaurava army giving the four generalissimos a Parva each. Bhīṣma fought for ten days and was struck down on the tenth day by an arrow from Arjuna.

(6) *Droṇa Parva* (Droṇa=The second Generalissimo). When Bhīṣma fell Droṇa took charge as the supreme commander. This Parva deals with the fight under his command. Droṇa was killed in the end by Dhṛṣṭadyumna.

(7) *Karṇa Parva.* (Karṇa=The third generalissimo). This Parva deals with the war under the command of Karṇa. Karṇa fell in the end at the hands of Arjuna.

(8) *Śalya Parva.* (Śalya=The fourth and last of the Generalissimos). When Karṇa fell Śalya took over charge of the Kaurava army. As the war was coming to an end most of the big warriors of the Kaurava army were killed. In the end Bhīma and Duryodhana met in a grim fight with maces in which Duryodhana was killed. This Parva deals with the final stage of the battle.

(10) *Sauptika Parva.* (Sauptika=pertaining to sleep). This Parva tells us the tragic story of how Kṛpācārya, Kṛtavarmā and Aśvatthāmā who were the only three left with Duryodhana after the great battle went into the camp of the Pāṇḍavas at night and killed all the brave warriors of the Pāṇḍava army, excepting the Pāṇḍavas, who were sleeping in their camp unaware of the foul play lying ahead.

(11) *Strī Parva.* (Strī=woman). This Parva deals with the great lamentation in the battlefield, after the war, of Gāndhārī and other women.

(12) *Śānti Parva.* Yudhiṣṭhira was crowned king and even at that time Bhīṣma was lying on his bed of arrows awaiting death. Before taking up his duties of the state Yudhiṣṭhira went to where the grandsire lay dying and took his blessing and instruction in dharma. This instruction of Bhīṣmācārya to King Yudhiṣṭhira of the three dharmas, Rājadharmā, Āpaddharmā and Mokṣadharmā is the famous Śānti Parva.

(13) *Anuśāsana Parva.* (Anuśāsana = Instruction). Bhīṣma still on his death-bed continues his instructions on several topics, like duty, freedom and fasting, giving entertaining stories to illustrate the essence of his teaching. This Parva is devoted to this.

(14) *Aśvamedhika Parva.* (Aśvamedha=yāga conducted by emperors). This Parva deals with the yāga conducted by Yudhiṣṭhira when he became the emperor of Bhārata.

(15) *Āśramavāsika Parva.* (Āśramavāsa=life in a hermitage). Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind and his wife Gāndhārī accompanied by Kuntī left for the forests and lived there for two years in a hermitage. One day the forest caught fire and the three without trying to escape sat on the ground facing eastwards in yoga posture and calmly gave up themselves to the flames. This is dealt with in this Parva.

(16) *Mausala Parva.* (Mausala=Mace). This Parva gives the story of how the Yādavas fought against each other with maces and were destroyed and how Dvārakā sank down into the ocean. It describes the death of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma also.

(17) *Mahāprasthānika Parva.* (Mahāprasthāna=Death). Dharmaputra entrusts his kingdom to his successor and alongwith his four brothers and wife Pāñcālī sets out on a long journey to Mahāmeru never to return. This journey to death is detailed in this Parva.

(18) *Svargārohaṇa Parva.* (Svarga=Heaven). This Parva describes the entry of the Pāṇḍavas and their relatives into Svarga, heaven.

3) *Mode of Narration.* Most of the verses in the Mahābhārata are in the Anuṣṭup metre. At certain places other metres also have been used. There are prose pieces also in it. There are twenty notable pieces, three in Ādi Parva, seven in Vana Parva, seven in Śānti