

## Changing patterns of Mahākāvya in Sanskrit Literature

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### **Introduction:**

The *mahākāvya*s have been playing an important role in the society. The ethics and value drawn from *mahākāvya*s have been the center of the disciplined society from the time immemorial. However, it has been very difficult to draw a common definition of the *mahākāvya*s. Things are defined on certain basis of *lakṣa* – in justification of this statement Sanskrit rhetoricians have been defining *mahākāvya*s and other literary forms on the basis of the analysis made on the great epics *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and other works of Mahākavi Kālidāsa. Indian rhetoricians form a *lakṣaṇa* (definition) depending on *lakṣa* and this has been admitted by ānandavardhana as he has mentioned in the vṛtti of *Dhvanyāloka* – *rāmāyaṇamahābhārataprabhṛtini lakṣye sarvatra prasiddhivyavahāraṁ lakṣayatam sahrda yānāmānando manasi labhatām pratiṣṭhām*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Objectives:**

The present paper tries to analyse the changing patterns of *mahākāvya* in Sanskrit literature along with the themes and style. The paper focuses on the definitions of *mahākāvya*, prescribed by the conventional and modern Sanskrit rhetoricians.

### **Methodology:**

The present work will follow some stages of systematic studies. The methodology of the research is entirely qualitative in nature. Some relevant books and materials are studied. The collected materials are compared and critically examined from the point of view of the objectives of the present work.

### **Analysis:**

Amongst the rhetoricians, who have made definitions on *mahākāvya*, Daṇḍin is the foremost one. In later period of him, Rūdraṭa has elaborated Daṇḍin's definition of *mahākāvya* in his *Kāvyaalamkāra*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dhvanyāloka*, p.26

Contemporary world requires the themes for the works which have the potentiality to exhibit the present scenario of society. Ancient works bear the subject matters which reflect ancient society. With the changing of time, literature demands new trends and new themes. Reflecting diverse aspects of modern society, *mahākāvya*s have been composed with different obtrusive manners. Modern rhetorician Abhiraja Rajendra Mishra has asserted new ideas for *mahākāvya*.

According to him, *mahākāvya* should be divided into *sarga* (cantos). The hero of the *mahākāvya* should be a person who is worthy of worship, who has the ability to establish fraternity and peace in the world. The hero may be a deity, a king who is fond of his subjects, a brilliant behavioral or well mannered virtuous person.<sup>2</sup> Rajendra Mishra has some differences of opinion from the conventional rhetoricians regarding selection of the hero. Daṇḍin states that hero of a *mahākāvya* should be any one from four kinds of heroes i.e. *dhīrodātta*, *dhīralalita*, *dhīroddhata* and *dhīrapraśānta* cf.-

*caturvargaphalopetaṁ caturodāttanāttanāyakaṁ* <sup>3</sup>

According to Viśvanātha Kavirāja, the hero of *mahākāvya* should be a deity, or a *ṣatriya* of noble family, having all the qualities of a *dhīrodātta* kind of *nāyaka*. A number of kings belonging to the same noble family may be the heroes of *mahākāvya*.<sup>4</sup>

Rajendra Mishra suggests a common person with noble qualities for the role of hero in a *mahākāvya*. This idea for choosing a hero has been tremendously practiced by the modern poets. *Gurunānakadevcaritam*, *Mahātmāyanam*, *Śaṅkaracaritam* etc., are a few examples of *mahākāvya* where the leading roles are played by some great personalities. A good numbers of *mahākāvya* have been composing by modern Sanskrit poets with the portrayal of national heroes.

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<sup>2</sup> sargabandho mahākāvyaṁ lokavandyajanāśrayam/

khyāpayadvīśvabandhutvaṁ sthāpayaduiśvamaṅgalam//

nāyakastatra devaḥ syātprajābandhuratho nṛpaḥ/

caruvaryo'thavā ko'pi sajjanaścaritojjvalaḥ//Abhirājajayaśobhūṣaṇam, IV.66-67

<sup>3</sup> Kāvyaḍarśa, p.14

<sup>4</sup> sargabandho mahākāvyaṁ tatraiko nāyakaḥ suraḥ/

sadvamśaḥ ṣatriyo vāpi dhīrodāttaguṇānvitaḥ//

ekavamśabhavā bhūpāḥ kulajā bhavo'pi vā/ Sāhityadarpaṇa, p.460

In the matter of depiction of scenes, there were certain selections followed by the traditional Sanskrit rhetoricians, even in contemporary period Rajendra Mishra mentions some events which should be exhibited in *mahākāvya*. Those scenes are –scenes of morning, evening, mid night, sunrise moonrise forest, garden, river, ocean, waterfall, mountain, cloud, village, hermitage, city, cave, armies, battle, celebration of child birth and conversation from huts. Prof. Mishra clearly states that being concerned about the main subject, matter (*ādhikārika itivṛtta*), suitable descriptions should be applied in *mahākāvya* as because, imposition of irrelevant descriptions not only bring annoyance to readers but also the work can fail to bring fame to the authors.

Because of these reasons, a *mahākāvya* has to be possessed worth descriptions of events which should be conducive to welfare of the society as well as factual in nature.<sup>5</sup>

The mentioned events for description are suggestion by the conventional rhetoricians Viśvanātha Kavirāja and Daṇḍin. Daṇḍin states that it is not mandatory to exhibit all the events, only those should be applied which can help to increase the relish of rasa or sufficient to captivate readers' minds.<sup>6</sup>

Viśvanātha Kavirāja accepts the number of cantos in *mahākāvya*, starting from eight cantos. He does not mention about the maximum number to be allowed for cantos in *mahākāvya*. To avoid irrelevant and extraneous description, Rajendra Mishra sets up marginal numbers from eight to twenty four cantos in a *mahākāvya*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> prātassandhyāniśithendubhāskorodayatārahā/  
vanodyānanadīsindhupapātādrībalāhākāḥ//  
grāmāśramapurā'ramadurgasainyaraṇodyamāḥ/  
putrajanmādivṛttāntāḥ pāmarāvāsasaṅkathā//  
itiuṛttānurodhātu varṇanīyā na cā'nyathā/  
prassarga varṇane teṣāṃ na ca tṛptirna vā yaśaḥ//  
yacchivaṃ yacca satyaṃ syādathavā lokamaṅgalam/  
varṇanīyaṃ prakalpyāpi kathāmśikṛtya sādaram// *Abhirājayaśobhūṣaṇam* IV. 69- 71

<sup>6</sup> nyūnamapyatra yaiḥ kaiścidaṅgaiḥ kāvyāṃ na duṣyati/  
yaddupātteṣu saṃpattirārādhajati tavidāḥ// *Kāvyaḍarśa*,1.20

<sup>7</sup> sargā aṣṭādhikāḥ santu kathāvistṛtisammatāḥ/  
aṣṭatriguṇatām yāvatsargasamkhyā prathīyasī//  
nodvegaḥ kavinā kāryaḥ pāthakānaṃ rasātmanām  
sargasamkhyādivistāralvarṇanairvā'napekṣitaiḥ// *Abhirājayaśobhūṣaṇam*, IV.72-73

Main theme of *mahākāvya* should be assisted by the *lokavṛtta* i.e. the events from the lives of common people. A *mahākāvya* with the picturization of common people's thought and life style becomes admirable amidst readers, cf.-

*lokavṛttam na hātavyam mūlavṛttopakāraṅgam/*

*lokacitraṅgarbham hi mahākāvyaṁ mahīyate //*<sup>8</sup>

The events of *lokavṛtta* can establish the mental connection with the common people. *Lokavṛtta* can establish the mental connection with the common people. *Lokavṛtta* comprises of the events which are very common and normal things of everyone's life. In this context, Rajendra Mishra's *mahākāvya Jānakījīvanam* is a suitable example. Sītā's childhood description, her marriage ceremony by *prājāpatya vidhi*, celebration of *holi* in the royal palace etc., are portrayed by the author in a very familiar way. The incidents of Sītā's childhood are depicted in a usual way as that of common people. The customs like marriage ceremony, *holi* all are practiced in the same way common people of society performs.

Indian traditions believe that poetry always deals with the knowledge of human pursuit i.e. *caturvarga*. The foremost necessity for a reader to read a poetry is to get the knowledge of *caturvarga* i.e. *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. Sanskrit rhetoricians have been emphasizing on *caturvargaphalaprāpti* as the principal purpose to read poetry. Rhetorician Daṇḍin mentions that acquisition of objects of human pursuit i.e. *caturvarga* is the main purpose of *mahākāvya*. According to Daṇḍin the knowledge on four objects of human pursuit can be obtained from a *mahākāvya* cf.-

*caturvargaphalpetam caturodāttanāyakaṁ //*<sup>9</sup>

Viśvanātha Kavirāja distinctly mentions that the knowledge of any one among the four objects of human pursuit can be rendered by a *mahākāvya*.<sup>10</sup> This view of Viśvanātha Kavirāja is accepted by Rajendra Mishra but he differs from his acceptance of four objects of human pursuit i.e. *caturvarga*. Rajendra Mishra recognizes three *puruṣārtha* as i.e. *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, he does not include *mokṣa* under *puruṣārtha*.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.220

<sup>9</sup> *Kāvyaśāstra*, p.14

<sup>10</sup> *catvārestasya vargāḥ syusteṣvekaṁ ca phalaṁ bhavet/ Sāhityadarpaṇa*, p.461

Amidst the three sentiments i.e. *śṛṅgāra*, *vīra* and *śānta*, only one sentiment should be delineated as predominant in *mahākāvya* as per the opinion of Rajendra Mishra, cf.-

*śṛṅgāravīrasāntānām kaścidanyatamo rasaḥ!*<sup>11</sup>

Viśvanātha also has the same opinion like Rajendra Mishra as he accepts any one amongst *śṛṅgāra*, *vīra* and *śānta* as the predominant sentiment and others than that are applied as sub ordinate sentiments (*aṅgarasa*).<sup>12</sup> Daṇḍin does not mention particularly about any sentiment to be applied as predominant in *mahākāvya*. Only thing he mentions that each and every canto should be entirely filled up with proper sentiments and *bhāvas*.<sup>13</sup>

Varieties of metres (*chanda*) and figures of speech (*alamkāra*) should be furnished in *mahākāvya* which can satisfy the hearts of the readers.<sup>14</sup> Rajendra Mishra has himself followed his own assertion for *mahākāvya* which composing *Jānakījīvanam*, he has applied varieties of metre already prevailed in Sanskrit literature, but most importantly Rajendra Mishra has initiated two metres viz- *maithelī* and *syandikā* in *jānakījīvanam mahākāvya*.

The new concept for *mahākāvya* initiated by Rajendra Mishra is that either a man or a woman should be appointed in the principal character who possesses extra ordinary and worthy qualities, cf.-

*lokottaraguṇādarśaḥ puruṣo nāyako bhavet/*

*mahīyasī purandhrī vā nā' tra kāryā vicāraṇā //*<sup>15</sup>

The conventional Sanskrit rhetoricians have not ever mentioned about a female to represent the principal character in *mahākāvya*. It is a courageous step of Rajendra Mishra that he undertakes a woman for the leading role which may be hostile attitude for some rhetoricians. In contemporary period, many works have been composed by practicing the idea of Rajendra Mishra.

<sup>11</sup> *Abhirājayaśobhūṣaṇam*, p.220

<sup>12</sup> *śṛṅgāravīrasāntānāmeko'ṅgī rasa iṣyate/*

*aṅgāni sarvi'pi rasāḥ sarve nāṭakasandhyah// Sāhityadarpaṇa*, IV.317

<sup>13</sup> *alamkṛtamasaṅkṣiptam rasabhāvanirantaram/ Kāvyaśāstra*, p.14

<sup>14</sup> *Sāhityakalpataru Abhiraja Rajendra Mishra*, p.169

<sup>15</sup> *Abhirājayaśobhūṣaṇam*, IV.78

Some *mahākāvya*s where women play the leading role are like- Sītā in *Jānakījīvanam* of Rajendra Mishra, Jhānsīrāni Lakṣmīvāi in *Jhānsīcaritam* of Subodhacandrapanta, Sītā in *Uttarasītācaritam* of Revaprasad Dvivedi etc.

Rajendra Mishra suggests the title of a *mahākāvya* on the basis of two perspectives: beauty of the subject matter and the greatness of the hero<sup>16</sup>. Thus Rajendra Mishra deviates from the opinion of Viśvanātha Kavirāja to specify the title of *mahākāvya* on the basis of the name of the poet hero, characters villain or plot of the *mahākāvya* cf.-

*kaverṛttasya vā nāmnā nāyakasyetarasya vā /*<sup>17</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The above cited discussion carries the opinions of conventional and modern Sanskrit rhetoricians regarding of *mahākāvya*. From time to time Sanskrit literary forms have been representing the culture and society; *mahākāvya* plays a very important role in this regard. With the change of the society, the literary forms have to be changed to exist its popularity. At present, the Sanskrit literary works have been reflecting the contemporary scenario of the society including all kinds of dimensions. These new styles and forms of Sanskrit literature mark its flourishing advancement.

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<sup>16</sup> kathāvaiśiṣṭyamālakṣya samajñān nāyakosya vā/ *Abhirājayaśobhūṣaṇam*, p.221

<sup>17</sup>*Sāhityadarpaṇa*, p.462

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