

ABSTRACT

One of the important aspects of literature is it tells us about the mood of the social milieu. History, on the other hand, limits itself to facts of the society. Historiography suggests that the absence of evidences makes history literature. Beowulf is a text of eighth century A.D. written in Anglo-Saxon period. It is considered as an epic and the text is prescribed in the syllabus of English Literature globally. The Mahabharata which is also an epic though being written in lyrical form we don't deal it in Literature. Both the epics came in written form after passing orally from generation to generation, hence contains many mythical stories. Both are assumed to have occurred in almost the same time span. None of them are treated as history but it is a common agreed assumption that both contain some historicity in them. A question comes that what did prevent Beowulf from becoming a god like Krishna? Similarly what does prevent Lord Krishna in Mahabharata from becoming an important literary character in literature? Both the texts in its original form is in "dead language". One contains literature and the other contains religion. The present study tries to find out literature in religion. The article also tried to find out the reasons behind making Beowulf a hero and Krishna a god.

Keywords: *Anglo-Saxon, Society, Epic, Mahabharata, Beowulf*

Oxford dictionary defines epic as "a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventure of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of the nation." Wikipedia searches lays down before us many characteristics of an epic like the Hero is outstanding, the setting is large, supernatural forces, special style of writing, etc... We also consider a literary text an epic when the poet remains objective and narrative opens in *medias res*. The above mentioned definitions cover all the important aspects of the work to be considered as an epic. When we look on these parameters we find that both the Mahabharata as well as the Beowulf is an epic. Beowulf is an epic written in Anglo-Saxon period. It is studied in the syllabus of many universities all across the world as an important literary work. The Mahabharata is another epic that has been taken into consideration in the present study in comparison to the Beowulf. It is believed that Mahabharata is written in 400 A.D. around the same period as the Beowulf. The research problem of the present study is: Why we do not consider the Mahabharata as a work to be dealt in literary studies. It is considered as Hindu literature but not simply a literary work at least with the same status like the Beowulf.

When we study the Beowulf in literature we consider the protagonist Beowulf as a character. As a character it has enough scope of analyses and interpretations and it has been analyzed and interpreted in various ways. It is criticized, praised and sometimes victimized by literary critics. We compare and contrast the character with contemporary human beings and humans of different Ages. Based on the character of the Beowulf many characters are portrayed in literature especially in fiction. It is also believed that the concept of superhero emerged from the Beowulf and hence the character of the Beowulf can be regarded as the first superhero of the world which was and is imitated by many fiction writers. There are many monologues in the Beowulf uttered by Beowulf (the character) that has not become as sacred and impactful as the Gita. My discussion is not on the Beowulf hence it is required to divert my arguments towards the reasons that prevented the Mahabharata from becoming popular literary text as the Beowulf. The Mahabharata is actually a celebration of different stories. It fulfills all the criteria of being an epic and even it has some characteristics which make it, to some extent, more than an epic. It is all but known that the stories and the characters discussed in the Mahabharata make a map that was later called as India. It depicts characters larger than life and events which leave indelible mark on the mind of the readers. The text has almost all the characteristics that make it a complete literature in all senses. The way in which numbers of stories are related makes it more interesting and huge.

In many textbooks of state boards, the smaller stories from Mahabharata are included. But the problem is that even after being the longest and the greatest epic it is not compulsory by a literature student to know it. An argument can be given that it was a Sanskrit text and Sanskrit is a dead language. It definitely becomes a weak argument as the Beowulf's English is very different English from the English that we use today. Above all the spirit of literature remains the same no matter what language it has been written in. In this context it can be said that by not including the Mahabharata in our syllabus we are not only stopping the utilization of it as a source of literary knowledge but also we are also sacrificing our literary pleasure. Thousands of translated scripts are available but we do not bother to include it even in the syllabus of Indian literature higher studies.

In important issue that is required to discuss here is if it is not the language that prevents it from becoming a literary text then what may be the other reasons. It seems that it is not the character "Krishna" rather the Lord Krishna that creates an obstacle for the Mahabharata to be a literary text. As soon as the character of Krishna (may be of Surya or Parsuraam) becomes the god and starts being worshiped it becomes a matter of religious belief. And it is the only rule that one cannot be questioned is religion. If we include the Mahabharata in our syllabus of literature, we would definitely need a semester to study it and in that one semester we would sometimes appreciate and sometimes criticize the text, characters and intentions of the epic. But this hypothetical one semester would become a disaster for a particular community. Not because students would demonize the epic and it will led to dehumanization of the characters but because our society is not yet ready to accommodate the fact that there can be literature in religion. When we take away the Mahabharata from the ambit of free discussion in the name of worship we are not only taking a text away but also prevents it from further enrichment. As it is the basic nature of such texts that after passing orally through ages it takes the form of text but when once composed and placed in some lock than it becomes a monotonous decoration on the rack of temples. Rather the way should be given, a flexibility is required to keep alive the text. We may take examples from last decades of twentieth century when Mahabharata and Ramayana were presented as daily shops before us. It made both the text alive and their popularity is undebatable. But before that it was considered that playing the role of god is an offence but once aired on doordarshan it became a source of knowledge for many kids growing at that age. Similarly when we would discuss it in literature class and make it an important part of the literature we will not only explore it but will discover and rediscover it. There is no exact evidence which enforces us to associate Mahabharata from any age or any community but as it has become a matter of one religion. Though it is believed that it was occurred at the Gupta period and it possibly best describes the social milieu of that age. We don't have exact evidence which would establish Mahabharata as an important event of the history. Some believes its occurrence, some says it a myth while other look at it as a celebration of stories. Definitely it is not a history because it does not fulfil the rules set by Historiography which says "history is the chronological and systematic study of the selected events of the past". Moreover history does not deals with miracles and supernatural forces and based on this parameters we believe Mahabharata a fiction not a history. This fiction is qualified enough to be dealt in literature and reason and its grandness is known by all. How poetic or lyrical Mahabharata inspires can be known only when once it is included.

Many plays, prose and poem were written in the west based on the Christianity and churches from Anglo-saxon periods till date and are studied not only because they don't have pluralism but also because they were able to find hidden literature in their religion. Idolizing a figure is a celebrated debate in the world but if these worshiped figure can be set free for open discussion, love and criticism that it would serve more fruitful. Many movies have tried and represented lord Krishna as the character for example OMG etc., they always kept sacred the character but never dared to raise question. This is certainly not a balanced approach to deal with a fictitious character. Once this barrier of religion should be removed and Mahabharata and its literature should be allowed to flourish and should be explored in each literature courses especially in India.

It is believed that religion serves the spiritual need but here we can find out that one of our literature is hidden in the religion and is unable to fulfill the academic need. Disciplines like Theology have emerged out to enrich the academic environment. So not only Mahabharata from one religion but many other text from different religion should be studied in literature given the condition it have the ingredients so that it can be considered as literature.