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The Mahābhārata's Core

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it is futile to appeal to exegetic traditions in the later versions and the commentators.

Moreover, Assyrian documents of the ninth to seventh centuries B.C. also refer to the burning of children to Adad and Ishtar (= Belet-šeri). The relevant passages, recently discussed by K. Deller,<sup>11</sup> are threats to parties who break contracts. Weinfeld (pp. 144f) follows Deller in recognizing five basic formulae:<sup>12</sup>

i. His eldest son will be burnt in the *hamru* of the god Adad.

ii. He will burn his son to Adadmilki, his eldest daughter, with two *se'ahs* of cedar resin, to Belet-šeri.

iii. He will burn his eldest son or his eldest daughter, with two *homers* of good spice, to Belet-šeri.

iv. He will burn his eldest son before Adadmilki, his eldest daughter before Belet-šeri. He will hand over seven priests and seven priestesses to Adad who dwells in Kurbail, and will give seven sacred male prostitutes and seven sacred female prostitutes to Ishtar who dwells in Arbail

v. He will burn his seven sons before Adad and will lead forth his seven daughters as sacred prostitutes to Ishtar.

Weinfeld also follows Deller in his interpretation; he says, "The burning of the children is not to be taken literally but rather figuratively, and denotes dedication to the idolatrous priesthood. This Deller derives from nos. iv and v above, in which it is specifically stated that the guilty party will deliver his sons and daughters as priests to Adad and Ishtar. In support of Deller's supposition it may be added that in this collection of documents the other penalties for a breach of contract are fines which went to the temple treasury . . . It is therefore not surprising to find also the dedication of sons and daughters to the temple" (p. 145).

<sup>11</sup> Review of R. de Vaux, "*Les Sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament*," *Orientalia* N.S. 34 (1965), 382-386, esp. pp. 383-4.

<sup>12</sup> Here translated from Assyriologese into English.

But the argument from iv and v is simply false. It is *not* specifically stated that the guilty party will deliver his sons and daughters as priests. On the contrary, in iv he is to burn his own children and to give—presumably pay for—twenty-eight incumbents of temple positions; there is no indication that these are to be his children, and it is *a priori* unlikely that the contractor was required to have at least thirty children, including fifteen males and fifteen females. No. v does suppose he has seven sons and seven daughters—a trait derived from curses rather than contracts.<sup>13</sup> That a man should make his seven daughters prostitutes, however sacred, is an understandable curse, but would you curse a man by saying that his sons should become priests? I doubt it. (The adjective "idolatrous" is of course a rabbinic anachronism; Assyrians liked idolatry.) Accordingly it is not surprising that the curse says, not that the sons become priests, but that they are to be burned. If "to be burned" meant "to be made a priest/prostitute" why should not the same terminology have been used for both groups, both in iv and in v? In iv it is particularly clear that something different is to be done to the son and daughter, something that distinguishes them from the twenty-eight persons given to be priests and lay sisters. Since, as Weinfeld remarks, the other penalties go to the temple, it is understandable that such personal and painful sacrifices should be stipulated: from the temple's point of view they would assure performance and, failing that, would increase its prestige and perhaps draw crowds. In sum, the arguments advanced for figurative interpretation are indefensible; we may plausibly presume the texts mean what they say.

The same conclusion holds for the Old Testament.

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<sup>13</sup> The Old Testament parallel is the rebuilding of Jericho I Kings 16:34.

### *The Mahābhārata's Core*

The need to divide the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh.) into manageable segments has been attempted by translators and critics with less than satisfactory results. The principle of division has almost universally been dictated by narrative considerations. It is, in fact, due to the cumbersome 100,000 verse legacy that E. W. Hopkins was forced to conclude that a Bhārata scholar had little prestige either in India or in the West. Hopkins stressed

the need for analysis rather than speculation in his book, *The Great Epic of India*, and it was from his work on the metrical peculiarities in the Mbh. that I was prompted to separate out all the non-śloka verses in the Poona edition for metrical and narrative analysis.

The metrical analysis was facilitated by the use of a digital computer. I wrote a program which would work directly on the transcribed Sanskrit. (Instead of trans-

literating, I assigned each phoneme a numerical equivalent and was able to transfer the Devanagari directly to computer cards). The program was designed to test the quantitative composition of each line. It prints out the quantitative pattern for each line and lists the total number of syllables in the line. A second program works on the generated data. The computer is able to compare each line and build up files on occurring patterns derived from the first program. The output lists all the patterns and includes the identification, book, verse and line number, for each occurrence. Such a program is more economical than submitting the established metrical patterns from the *Piṅgala Sutra* and then testing the lines against the patterns in the computer.

Of the approximately 4500 non-śloka verses in the Mbh. 30% scanned into the classical upajāti metre; 4% are vaṃśastha and 12% are other identifiable classical Sanskrit patterns. However, 54% of the non-śloka verses in the Mbh. must be classified as irregular triṣṭubh verses.

The term triṣṭubh refers to a line of eleven syllables, but it is common to speak of four consecutive lines as a triṣṭubh verse. The fixed classical pattern of the eleven syllable line is called upajāti, and it allows no deviation from a quantitative pattern of short syllable in the third, sixth, seventh, and ninth position of the line. An upajāti verse has four matching lines. The initial syllable of an upajāti line may be either short or long. The fact that the Mbh. verses often have a line of 12 or 13 syllables, rarely only 10, led Franklin Edgerton (*JAOS*. Vol. 59, No. 2, June, 1939) to use the term "hypermetric triṣṭubhs." The term "irregular triṣṭubh" indicates a lack of matching quantitative patterns in the four lines of a verse, and it includes the occasional hypermetric line as an irregularity. A classical Sanskrit verse is marked by total regularity, and thus Edgerton termed the hypermetric tendency and irregular patterning of the Mbh. triṣṭubhs as a "Vedic inheritance."

I have come to think of the approximately 2000 irregular verses (about 8000 lines) as related to late Vedic triṣṭubh patterns. I am presently studying the pattern of versification in the triṣṭubh hymns of the Tenth Book of the *Rg Veda*. Within the irregular triṣṭubh verses of the Mbh. I have found several links to the late Vedic period, and I am convinced that the Vedic-triṣṭubh-type verses of the Mbh. form the oldest extant layer or core of the epic.

E. Vernon Arnold noted the peculiarities of the Vedic triṣṭubh metre: "It is difficult to think that a professional bard should without motive have left his verse with an irregular rhythm, when any European scholar, without serious practice of the art of versification, can put it into order for him with hardly a perceptible alteration in the meaning." The idea of tampering with the text

in order to adjust "faulty" lines is evident in the Mbh. textual variants which are glossed in the Poona text. Arnold goes on to say, "It is also difficult to think that professional reciters and their instructors could by mere accident have left stanzas in a shape which must make them a perpetual burden to the memory. In these 'irregularities' there may be meanings not easily recognized, and for this reason they deserve to be carefully studied." (*Vedic Metre*, p. 21).

Arnold's statement applies aptly to the Mbh.'s irregular triṣṭubhs. The notion that Vedic triṣṭubh-types may still be found in the Mbh. is the challenge of the metrical work. The fact that types of narrative cohesiveness are demonstrable once the verses have been excised is only an impetus to broaden the investigation into the fields of syntactic and narrative techniques. It also may be necessary to re-examine Arnold's work on the triṣṭubh versification in the *Rg Veda* after submitting the triṣṭubh hymns to a computer analysis.

Before exploring the evidence of narrative cohesiveness in the triṣṭubh verses, I must mention two conditions that I began to notice while excising the 4500 non-śloka verses from the 75,000 + corpus of the Poona text. First, the non-śloka verses tend to occur in clusters. The principle of clustering seems to be solely attributable to narrative consideration. Second, a run of non-śloka verses which contains irregular triṣṭubh verses often demonstrates a condition I call layering if the number of verses in the run exceeds five. For example, in *Ādi Parvan*, 1.190, verses one through five are irregular verses, verses six and seven have two quantitative patterns, and verses eight through eighteen are in vaṃśastha metre.

The tendency of the Mbh. triṣṭubh verses to exist in clusters is in contrast to the triṣṭubh verses in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where they occur singly or in short runs at the end of chapters where they seem to serve the function of summing up the narrative. On the other hand the Mbh. triṣṭubhs occupy whole chapters, and in chapters where they are mixed with ślokas it is often possible to demonstrate narrative cohesion in the triṣṭubhs once they are removed from the śloka material.

The main clusters of the irregular verses occur in Books One through Five. There are a few sections in Book Six and a triṣṭubh chapter in Book Seven (7.2), but the clustering tendency is obvious again in Book Eight. The Death of Karna seems tied to the triṣṭubh tradition as does the Marriage Alliance, the Gambling and Negotiation themes. Clustering is not a refined analytical tool, but it does seem to indicate a compiler's dictum that similar story materials should be placed together. The fact that the irregular triṣṭubh clusters contain the key stories of the Bhārata war points toward the conclusion that the clusters themselves are the core of the epic.

The evidence of layering creates a more refined analytical tool. It may be a key to some of the epic's most locked-in problems. Layering is a name I have borrowed from archeology in order to designate demarcations of metrical patterns within a story construct. The passage at 1.190 is an example of irregular verses and proto-classical verses which are woven together by two verses which may even be considered a third type since they presage the move to total regularity of pattern by their evidence of two patterns in the eight lines. There are

six different patterns in the eight lines of verses two and three, for instance. Verses four and five of 1.190 contain four hypermetric lines. Thus the irregularity of verses one through five mark them as one layer. Narrative analysis following the marks of metrical layering becomes a tedious assignment, especially when more subtle layering can be detected by the computer analysis of occurring patterns of upajāti lines. A ratio of upajāti lines can be established for a specific section of verses. Consider the table based on the *Svayamvara* section of *Ādi Parvan*:

Table 1

Chapter	No. of lines of non-śloka	Hypermetric lines	Upajāti lines	Ratio of Upajāti lines
176	12	-	8	66%
178	72	2	66	92%
179	20	1	17	85%
180	36	1	35	99%
181	4	-	4	100%
182	40	-	37	93%
183	38	1	19	53%
184	64	1	54	84%
185	112	2	106	94%
186	60	-	58	96%
189	156	28	37	28%

The move toward the classical Sanskrit fixed quantitative regularity seems indicated by an increase in the ratio of upajāti lines. It is likewise obvious that chapter 189 represents a lack of fixed quantitative pattern. The verses of chapter 189 are the irregular Vedic-type triṣṭubh verse. The concept of layering is useful in a chapter like 183 with a 53% ratio of upajāti lines. Verses two through six are almost uniformly upajāti lines, while verse one and verses seven through nine are quite irregular in patterning. Yet it is difficult to make narrative distinctions on such limited array. A more convincing example of narrative distinction based on metrical layering is observable in Book Two, the *Sabhā Parvan*.

The Gambling section of Book Two, chapters 52 through 68, has 150 triṣṭubh verses. Edgerton thought that they were all of the irregular hypermetric variety but computer scansion showed that chapter 60, the scene of Draupadī's outrage, has an 88% content of upajāti lines. However, the first eight triṣṭubh verses of the chapter show only random occurrences of the upajāti lines—14% to be exact. These eight verses can be considered one layer. Verses seven through eleven and 14 and 15 are śloka verses. Verses 16-47 are triṣṭubh, and of the 128 lines, 112 are upajāti pattern for a ratio of 87%. Edgerton noted the narrative problem in editing Book Two of the critical text:

Clearly we have here two entirely different versions of the story. In one Yudhiṣṭhira sends a trusted messenger commanding Draupadī to come, and she does so. In the other, Duḥśāsana at Duryodhana's command drags her in by violence. Some one may suggest that by excluding verses 14 and 15, the only ones relating to the former version, we should get a consistent text. Such a critic might conjecture that 14-15 were first written on the margin of some early manuscript and (either by inheritance from it, or in part by contaminatory inter-borrowing) have now got into all our mss. May be that is what happened. It would be impossible to disprove it; but equally impossible to prove it.

from the Preface to *Sabhā Parvan*, xxxii.

What seems clear to me is that the story element of Draupadī's insult is established in the first six verses. Edgerton has not indicated that there are intervening śloka verses at 7-11 because he is basing his narrative assessment on them rather than on the first six triṣṭubh verses. However, by excising the ślokas from the chapter a sequence of direct confrontations between Draupadī and the messenger are set in high relief. At verse 16 there is a shift into third person narration. The percentage of upajāti lines in the section 16-47 would seem to argue for a much later dating of the material and consideration

of it as a text derived from the kernel of dialogue verses. It seems that the case parallels 1.190 and may serve as a model for analysis of metrical and narrative layers within the non-śloka clusters of the epic.

The problems in analyzing one chapter of verses are increased by proportion in considering whole clusters of non-śloka verses and then analyzing the narrative climate of the śloka verses from which they have been

excised. The principle of layering works equally, if not as dramatically, when there are mixtures of śloka and non-śloka, but the test of a core of old verses seems to devolve on the presence of irregular Vedic-type verses in a cluster. The following table indicates the general deposit of a Bhārata war epic core. I have set the following sections aside for translation and commentary based on metrical and narrative criteria:

Table Two

<i>Book</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Verses</i>	<i>Narrative Content</i>
One	1	102-158	story framework mechanism in triṣṭubh metre
		176-190	Pāṇḍava marriage alliance
Two	49-68		Gambling match
Three	5-6	35	Vidura visits Pāṇḍavas in exile
		254	Yudhiṣṭhira's explanation of gambling
	22-40	47	Draupadī's description of her husbands
		64	Attempts at discussion through messengers
Five	47	64	Arjuna's message to the Kurus
		65	Krishna's response
	90-91	65	the messenger's plea for safety
		90-91	Krishna takes on the peace mission
	160	160	Arjuna's reply to a taunt
		160	Arjuna's reply to a taunt
Six	4	21-22	list of ill-omens for Kurus
		24	description of armies
	116	24	Arjuna hesitates to kill the grandsire
		47-51	death of Bhiṣma
Seven	2		Karṇa assumes command of the Kuru army
Eight	4	90-105	Saṁjaya reports the death of Karṇa
		26	40-71
	27-30	27-30	Karṇa takes Śalya as chariot driver
		45-49	45-49
Eight	53-54	53-54	Bhīma fights
		57	Arjuna is attacked
	61-67	61-67	the death of Karṇa
		68	Śalya assumes command of the Kurus
Nine	16	16	death of Śalya
		19	death of Śālva
	27	27	death of Śakuni
		58	death of Duryodhana
Fifteen	21		Dhṛtarāṣṭra leaves for exile in the forest

While I have not included any non-śloka chapters which are composed of regular classical metre, I am convinced that they should be introduced into the discussion of a triṣṭubh core of the *Mahābhārata*. The chapters composed in regular upajāti metre seem to indicate the classical use of ancient materials, and they argue for the existence of a non-śloka tradition of epic composition. The *Mahābhārata* needs to be understood

as a tradition which still retains traceable growth rings. The classical verses are the elaborations of a bardic tradition stemming from the heroic past. The presence of the irregular Vedic-type verses argues for new possibilities of recreating that heroic past as it was transmitted in the oral tradition.

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