

A FRESH GLIMPSE ON THE DATE OF MAHĀBHĀRATA

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(Received 9 September 1987)

This article throws some light upon the date of the famous *Bhārata* battle and the epic *Mahābhārata* on the basis of some inscriptions, quotations, and astronomical and historical facts. On the basis of the facts presented, it appears that the views of *A Concise History of Science in India* regarding the date of the war and the epic need to be reexamined.

Analysis of past scientific or cultural developments of any country or race demands investigation into the chronology of old events and literature. So, in order to find out the developments of science in ancient India, we should have to look into the scriptures and their chronology. These scriptures primarily include the *Vedas*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, etc. While seeking some scientific facts in *Mahābhārata*, the present author came across some facts which urged him to look afresh into the dates of the war around which the scripture is woven as also into the scripture itself.

It should be noted here that the ancient scholars used calendars in terms of *yuga* as is clear from a verse of *āryabhatīya* which states that :

“When sixty times sixty years and three quarter *yugas* (of the current *yugas*) had elapsed, twenty three years have then passed since my birth.”¹

This *śloka* tells of the epoch when 3600 years had elapsed since the beginning of the current *Kaliyuga*. It is well-known that the present *Kaliyuga* commenced after the *Bhārata* war. In fact, it commenced on the day on which Lord Kṛṣṇa left his earthly abode.² It is also stated in astronomical trend as :

“When the seven *Ṛṣis* (that is the seven stars of the constellation of the Ursa Major) entered the asterism *Maghā*, then *Kaliyuga* commenced.”³

According to *Mahābhārata* itself, the famous *Bhārata* battle was fought at the conjunction of the *Dvāpara* and *Kaliyuga*.⁴

The most powerful evidence regarding the date of the *Bhārata* battle is the inscription of Aihole due to the king Pulakeśin II which, according to *Epigraphia Indica*⁵ reads as :

*Trimśatsu trisahasreṣu bhāratādāhavāditaḥ
Saptābdaśatayukteṣu gateṣvabdeṣu pañcasu
Pañcāśatsu kalau kāle śaṭṣu pañcaśatīsu ca
Samāsu samatīāsu śakānāmapī bhūbhujām.*

This literally means that “(now) when thirty (and) three thousand and five years besides joined with seven hundred years, have passed since the *Bhārata* war. — — And when fifty (and) six and five hundred years of the *śaka* kings also have gone.”

This indicates clearly that the *Bhārata* battle was fought before (3735 - 556 =) 3179 years of the commencement of the *śaka* era. Also, it is well-known that the *śaka* era commenced 135 years after the commencement of *vikram* era and 78 years after the commencement of the Christian era. Hence, one arrives at the conclusion without any reservation that the battle was fought 3044 years before the commencement of *vikram* era or 3102 B.C.

Usually the history of victory of a king is written during his regime. So it is natural that the composition of *Bhārata* or *Jayakāvya* was done during the regime of Yudhiṣṭhira. Moreover, it is also natural that it was composed after the demise of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (since it was an insult to him). It is also confirmed by *Mahābhārata* itself that the treatise *Bhārata* was composed by Vyāsa after the demise of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura.⁶ Yudhiṣṭhira lived for 36 years after the war. According to *Mahābhārata*, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, after the war, lived for 15 years with Yudhiṣṭhira in Hastināpur and for 3 years in forests.⁷ After the demise of Pāṇḍu, Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vyāsa began the composition of the *Jaya* or *Bhārata* and completed it in three years.^{7a} Thus *Bhārata* was composed in a period between the 20th and the 23rd years of the end of the war.

The treatise was existing at the time of Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna since Vyāsa ordered his disciple Vaiśampāyana to recite the treatise on the occasion of *Sarpayajña*.⁸ This fact indicates that the *Bhārata kāvya* was already in existence in the 30th century B.C.

Some scholars have serious reservations against this thesis and argue like this :

Although Vāsudeva, Arjuna, etc. are found in the literature of Pāṇini yet there is no mention of *Bhārata* or *Mahābhārata*. This forces one to put *Mahābhārata* after Pāṇini (5th century B.C.).

The reader can easily see the falacy of this argument when he finds Mahābhārata in an aphorism of Pāṇini which is :

“*Mahān brīhyaparāhṇagrṣṭīsvāsajābālabhāratabhāratahailihilarauravapra-
vrdheṣu*”⁹

Webber seems to have bungled on this point by saying :

“In Pāṇini the word Mahābhārata, does indeed occur ; not, however, as denoting the epic of this name, but as an appellative to design at any individual of special distinction among the Bhāratas like Mahā-Jābāla, —Halihīḷ”.¹⁰

It is well-known that in the Indian scriptures there is neither any person of special distinction of the name ‘Mahābhārata’, nor is there any race of this name. Hence Webber’s assumption that the term Mahābhārata of Pāṇini does not denote the epic of this name is baseless. ‘Droṇa’ also occurs in the aphorism of Pāṇini.¹¹ Pāṇini further refers to Vidura (III.2.162), Vāsudeva & Arjuna (IV.3.98), Yudhiṣṭhira (VIII.3.95), Bhīma (III.4.74), Nakula (VI.3.75), Andhakas, Vṛṣṇis and Kurus (IV.1.114) and also the Gāṇḍīva bow (V.2.110).

Not only Pāṇini, Yāskācārya (prior to Pāṇini) mentions in his *Nirukta*¹² the Akrūra incident which belongs to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹³ Thus, this *Purāṇa* goes back to a period earlier than that of *Nirukta*. It should also be noted here that according to this very *Purāṇa*, *Bhārata* was composed before this *Purāṇa* by the same author,¹⁴ i.e., sage Vyāsa. Hence, one should have no doubt that the epic *Bhārata* belongs to a period earlier than that of *Nirukta*.

A few words on the period of Yāskācārya may not be out of place here. Some terms used by Yāska as *saṃjñā* have been thought of as *pratyaya* (suffix) by Pāṇini. For example, while explaining *Ādaghnāsaḥ* of *Ṛgveda*¹⁵ Yāska gives derivation of *daghna* accepting it as a *saṃjñā*,¹⁶ while Pāṇini accepts it as *pratyaya* in :

*Pramāṇe dvayasajdaghnac mātracaḥ*¹⁷

Similarly, Yāska accepts *vati* as *nāmapada*¹⁸ (a particular type of *saṃjñā*) and gives its derivation from *Av* ; while Pāṇini accepts it as a *pratyaya* in :

Upasargācchandasi dhātvarthe.¹⁹

It is well known that such a development of a certain *saṃjñā* term being conceived of as a *pratyaya* cannot take place within 1 or 2 centuries but requires a number of centuries. This forces one to infer that Yāskācārya belonged to a period much earlier than that of Pāṇini.

Further, analysis by references goes a long way to determine the sequence of the dates of *Bhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. Reference to *Mahābhārata* may be seen at several places in the literature. References to the characters in the epic in the *Yajurveda* and the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya and the quotations of the verses of the epic in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali and the *Nyāyabhāṣya* of Vātsyāyana

are well known. The great poet Kālidāsa mentions *Kauravas* in his *Meghadūta* as *Kṣetram kṣatrapradhānapiśunam Kauravam tadbhajethāh*.²⁰ Udyotakara, who composed *Nyāyavārtika* and who was mentioned in *Vāsavadattā*, quoted *Mahābhārata*²¹ in the context of an aphorism of Gautama.²² Śabaravāmī, the commentator of *Mīmāṃsā* aphorisms quotes *Mahābhārata*²³ in his commentary on the aphorism (8.1.2) of *Mīmāṃsādarśana*.

Several incidents of *Mahābhārata* find their mention in the famous *Kathā Saritsāgara*. Sundopasunda incident of *Kathāsaritsāgara*²⁴ belongs to *Ādiparva*, Chapter 201. Kuntī-Durvāsā incident of *Kathāsaritsāgara*²⁵ belongs to *Ādiparva*, 113.32. Murder of the sage Kindabha by Pāṇḍu²⁶ belongs to *Ādiparva*, Chapter 108. Śakuntalā incident which is the base of the famous treatise *Śakuntalā* of Kālidāsa, belongs to *Ādiparva*, Chapter 62.

On the other hand, *Mahābhārata* quotes *Rāmāyaṇa* profusely. In the *Ādiparva* Sañjaya gives an account of the religious and righteous persons (mostly kings of *Ikṣvāku* dynasty), who lived in the remote past and had to leave this world. He particularly mentions²⁷ the names of Dāśarṭhi Rāma, Śaśabindu and Bhagīratha. A summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is given in the *Vanaparva* 273-292 Chapters of *Mahābhārata*. Not only this, brief account of the whole *Rāmakathā*, has been narrated by way of dialogue between Bhīma and Hanumāna in *Vanaparva*.²⁸

Some scholars hold an unusual type of convention. According to them, although the events told in *Rāmāyaṇa* took place before the *Bhārata* war yet the scripture *Mahābhārata* was composed before *Rāmāyaṇa*. Their delusion is perhaps due to overlooking or ignoring the verses of *Mahābhārata* which quote *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* by name as "It has been narrated by Vālmīki long ago".²⁹ At another place Bhīma says "Vānarapuṅgava (Hanumāna) is very well known in *Rāmāyaṇa*".³⁰ These facts show that *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed long before the composition of *Mahābhārata*.

In *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* we can see quotations from only one treatise, namely *Manusmṛti*. Verses 8.316 and 8.318 are found in *Vālmīkiya Rāmāyaṇa*³¹ with very slight variation.

Thus it is not far from truth as indicated by the above analysis that the *Bhārata* war took place in 3102 B.C. and that the composition of *Jaya Kāvya* or *Mahābhārata* was done within 100 years after the war, i.e., before 3000 B.C. Also, *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed long before the *Bhārata* war.

In the light of the facts stated above, the following statements :

- (1) Bhārata war took place between 850 B.C. and 650 B.C. or 1400 B.C. ;
- (2) As stated by Winternitz,³² *Mahābhārata* was compiled between 200 B.C. and A.D. 400 ; and
- (3) *Rāmāyaṇa* was compiled between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.

contained in *A Concise History of Science in India*³³ may be reexamined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is thankful to the authorities of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla for a Fellowship and necessary facilities in the period in which the article was prepared.

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- ³ *Ibid.*, 12.2.31.
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- ⁷ *ibid.*, Āśramavāsikaparva, 3.12 and 20.32 vide also XV, 39.25 and 20.32.
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²⁷ *Mahābhārata Ādiparva*, 1.225-233.

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²⁹ *ibid.*, Droṇaparva, 143.67.

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