

Oral Stories Related to Mahabharata

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Abstract

Ramayana and Mahabharata are two great epics of the subcontinent of India. Over the generations, these are narrated orally also. Janamejaya, the successor of the Gaurava vamsa (Arjuna's great grandson) asked the sage to tell the story of his predecessors while he was doing the yagna for snakes. So, Vaisampaayanar told the story in the presence of the great Sage Vyasa. Vyasa dictated the story and Lord Ganesha wrote it with one of his tusks. It was in Sanskrit. The stories were written in other Indian languages also. Each Indian language has added some of the incidents according to their culture. So the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata have many interpolations in them. Though Ramayana and Mahabharata have written editions, still there are many stories in oral literature not yet entered in the written version. This paper aims at describing some of the incidents which are related to Mahabharata, but not included in the written literature and still remain part of the oral tradition.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vaisampaayanar, Vyasa, Oral tradition, folk literature.

Drudarastra's Method of Eating Food

For Drudarastra, there were 32 plates full of meals that were served each time he ate. That was because he had a curse that if he touched the food on the plate more than once, the food would turn into worms. For a person 32 handfuls of food is necessary to fill the stomach. So

from each plate Drudarastra took one handful of food and in that manner he took from 32 plates 32 handfuls and ate. Karna, the eldest son of Kunti was brought up by the chariot driver of Drudarastra. Since Drudarastra's bungalow was the chariot driver's work place, he used to bring his son Karna there. One day Karna was crawling; he went near Drudarastra's plate. That time Drudarastra had taken one handful from that plate. Karna touched the food. Immediately the worms in the plate disappeared. This amazing incident was informed to Drudarastra. Drudarastra felt very happy, picked up Karna, hugged him and praised him saying, (களபமுனை நீக்க வந்த கர்ணமகராசன் நீ) "you are the one who came to remove the thousands of worms from my food, so you are KarNa from today". KarNa's original name Vasusena, and that became secondary, while KarNa became his first name. So Drudarastra had a soft corner for Karna. That was why he never controlled KarNa's habit of giving away his wealth to all. KarNa gave donations from the treasury of Drudarastra. But after KarNa's alms-giving, Drudarastra with some disgust, used to search the treasury to see whether anything was left in there or not. Instead of being empty, the treasury became full.

This episode is not found in the written editions of Mahabharata either in Tamil or Telugu. But it was orally narrated by parents to children. Just like this one, many interpolations are still in oral form and not put into the written form. Here are some of them mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Another Oral Story

Sakuni was the paternal uncle to Duriyodana and younger brother of Gandhari. But he was always trying to ruin the Gaurava dynasty. There was a reason for this. Those days Bhishma

was a great warrior. No one could defeat him. If he wanted to do anything, by hook or crook he would do it. He wanted to bring Gandhari as a wife to Drudarastra and a daughter-in-law to his dynasty. But the Gandhara king Supalan did not wish to give his daughter to the blind king. So Bhisma went with his army to conquer Ghandhara. Bhisma conquered Gandhara and took the king and his sons captives. He made Gandhari his brother's wife. Supalan wanted to take revenge on the Gaurava Dynasty; there were a hundred sons. Sakuni was one among them. He was clever and intelligent. In the prison the jailor used to give a handful of rice to each one of them. Supalan told his other sons that they should give their food to Sakuni, so he could live long and take revenge on Gaurav Dynasty. All accepted that suggestion. After some time all the brothers and Supalan died. Sakuni came out of prison and lived with his sister. From that time he began to try to ruin the Gaurava dynasty.

During a gambling game, the Pandavas lost all their property and kingdom. Duriyodana ordered them to go to the jungle for 12 years and follow for a year life incognito, ignoring his father Drudarastra's wish to give back to the Pandavas their kingdom. While living in the forest, whenever they moved from one place to another, they kept moving in one order. Dhrama used to lead, behind him came Draupati, one side of Draupati walked Bhima, another side of Draupati was Nakula, behind Draupati, Arjuna and Sahadeva. One day they were walking in the forest. That time a Gandarva was travelling in the sky. He saw Draupati and was attracted by her beauty. While flying close, he abducted Draupati. As soon as he heard of this incident, Dhrama asked where Draupati was. Immediately Bhima said: "Brother! You order me to bring Draupati. I will bring her." Yudistra gave permission. Bhima put his weapon on the earth and jumped up the sky and caught hold of the Gandarva's leg. Gandharva realized that he could not escape from Bhima. He thought that the lady who was not helpful to him was not useful to anybody. So, he

threw Draupati down. Observing this, Bhima asked Arjuna, the son (who was born as a boon given to a devotee) of god Indra, to catch hold of Draupati. Arjuna caught hold of Draupati without any injury promptly. This incident proves the willpower and strength of the Pandavas.

Name of Arjuna

Arjuna was disguised as Bruhannala, while they were following their life incognito. In one incident Krishna asked Arjuna to act as a female. He gave him the name Bruhannala. While they were ready to follow their life incognito, Draupati said that the wife and husband could call each other by pet names. She gave the name Gangnan to Yudistra. The she said, “I will give a name to Arjuna...”. Immediately Arjuna said, “Draupati! you don’t have to give me a name. Why, because Madav alias Krishna already gave a name. That name is Bruhannala.” (On TV – on Vijay Channel, Mahabharatam, a daily serial)

But there is another version. Once, Indra invited Arjuna, his son to heaven. So Arjuna went to heaven. There Urvasi met Arjuna and asked him to have intimate relations with her. But Arjuna told her she was like his grandmother, and how could he be intimate with her. Urvasi got angry and put a curse on him to become an animal. Then Arjuna complained about this incident to his father; and he tried to convince Urvasi to take the curse off. But Urvasi said that the curse could not be reversed. Arjuna could utilize this curse for one year when he needed. In that way he utilized this curse when the Pandavas were incognito.

Independent Royalty

At the time of Monarchy, if a king did Rajasuya Yagna he could declare himself as an independent king. Since the Pandavas were under the control of Drudarastra, they wanted to

become independent kings. So after Bhima succeeded Jarachand, Krishna wanted to do the Rajasuya Yaga. So Yudistra performed that one. He invited all the kings. He also invited Duryodhana. The Indraprasta kingdom was built with the help of Maya. So it had many wonders like the palace that was built inside water. One flower girl welcomed the guests. While walking in the palace, in one place Duryodhana thought there was water. He walked carefully as if he was walking in the water. In another place, where water really was there, he walked in a carefree manner. So he fell down. Draupati who was observing this laughed loudly. Duryodhana felt so ashamed and also felt so angry. At that moment he wanted to take revenge on Draupati. But this was different from the scene which was broadcast in Vijay T.V. Mahabharatam serial.

Nakula and Sahadeva

Mathiri's sons are Nakula and Sahadeva. Sahadeva is well versed in astrology. According to his dharma of occupation, even if his enemy asked about his future and there was something inauspicious or fortunate supposed to happen, he had to forecast it without hiding the fact. Before starting the Bharata War some ceremonial activities like giving human sacrifices, finding the auspicious time for starting the war and so on, had to take place. Duryodhana first approached Sahadeva and asked him to find the auspicious time to start the war. Sahadeva told him if you start the war at full moon day, after giving a faultless human as a sacrifice, you will certainly win in the great Bharata war. Then he left. Immediately Krishna who was present there asked Sahadeva whether he had paved the way for their defeat. And Arjuna's son Nallaravan is ready to become the sacrifice. Krishna asked them what they were thinking about him. He said that he was always looking out for them, for their victory. Immediately Sahadeva told Krishna that he knew who he was; he knew Krishna was trying to destroy all the people in the world including them. So he told him not to talk as if he was working for them. Then Krishna asked

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Sahadeva if he could stop the Bharata War. Sahadeva said that the Bharata War could be stopped if they did certain things. Krishna asked what they were. Sahadeva said that if they could make Yudistra as sanyasi, send Bhima and Arjuna to the underground jail, cut Draupati's hair and keep her in his heart, these would stop the Bharata War. Krishna laughed and said that as far as his people were concerned, they could do what they wanted, but he wondered how he could keep him in his heart. Sahadeva asked if he should keep him in his heart there. Krishna told him not so, and they would go their separate ways. Then both of them went into one room. As soon as they entered the room, Krishna split into many figure and filled the whole room. Sahadeva sat in the middle of the room and meditated saying Krishnaa!!!. Immediately all the split figures entered into Sahadeva's mind. Sahadeva controlled his breath. Krishna was inside his heart, and Sahadeva felt breathless. He asked Sahadeva to relish the experience. But Sahadeva told Krishna he knew who he was: "You will kill all the people in the war including us. So if you promise to save me, my four brothers, Draupati and one of the successors, then I will release you." Then Krishna promised him he would do that. Sahadeva released him. Krishna asked Sahadeva not to reveal this secret to anybody, and Sahadeva agreed to do what he asked.

Pandava Ruke

Pandavas ruled their kingdom happily. Once there was an invitation from Krishna telling him he was not feeling well. Immediately Bhima and Arjuna said they should go and see Krishna, But Yudistra not only refused to go to see Krishna, but he also did not allow Bhima and Arjuna to go. Bhima and Arjuna wanted to go and see Krishna. So Yudistra asked them not to touch him if he wanted to touch both of them. Then Bhima and Arjuna went to Duvaraka. There they saw Krishna. As soon as he saw them, Krishna wanted to get up and sit. So he asked Bhima and Arjuna to help. But they refused to touch him remembering their brother's advice. Krishna

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asked them to give at least their gadha (a heavy decorated dome like ball with a short handle) and bow. They did accordingly. Krishna took all their strength through their weapons. While coming to see him, both of them carried their weapons so easily. But after Krishna took their strength they could not carry their weapons. They placed them on their heads and reached their kingdom. Seeing this, Yudistra asked them why they did not listen to his words. He felt their time was over. They should crown his son Parikshitu and leave the kingdom. They did that and then travelled to heaven. That is a different story.

The Story of Two Farmers

In the Bharata War, Pandavas won the war. Yudistra was crowned king and ruled. One day two farmers came with a treasure pot. Of the two farmers one farmer had bought land from the other farmer. The farmer who bought the land found treasure in that land. That farmer went to the other farmer who sold the land and told him that he got treasure from the land he had sold him; so he said that the treasure was his. Immediately, the farmer who had sold the land said that he had sold the land to him, so the treasure was his. Both of them argued on and on. Then the case came to Yudistra. He heard the case; he had to give the correct judgment for that case. So he asked them to come the day after. But the next day the Kaliyuga started. The king of Bharata Varsha now happened to be Parikshitu. When the two farmers came, Parikshitu listened to the case. Then he asked farmer number one whether he had a son. He said he did. Then he asked the other farmer if he had a daughter. He answered in the affirmative. Parikshitu wisely advised them to get the daughter of the one married to the son of the other and give the treasure as a wedding gift to them. Both farmers felt very happy and praised the king. They left the king's court completely satisfied.

Conclusion

In the above examples of the stories that are still in the oral tradition, we can see some good stories that are a real part of the culture and community of a country. Hope one day these stories would get written down and would be available to a larger audience. There are many such stories narrated in many communities in India, in many languages and dialects. It will be interesting to collect these and interpret them to find out how we all understand and interpret epics at the spoken level.

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