

**MAHA-BHARATA, THE
EPIC OF ANCIENT
INDIA CONDENSED
INTO ENGLISH VERSE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649641642

Maha-Bharata, the Epic of Ancient India Condensed into English Verse by Romesh Dutt & F. Max Müller

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ROMESH DUTT & F. MAX MÜLLER

**MAHA-BHARATA, THE
EPIC OF ANCIENT
INDIA CONDENSED
INTO ENGLISH VERSE**

o *Mahābhārata. (Selections)*

MAHA-BHARATA
The EPIC *of* ANCIENT INDIA
CONDENSED *into* ENGLISH VERSE
By ROMESH ^{Chunder} DUTT, C.I.E.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE RIGHT HON. F. MAX MÜLLER

TWELVE PHOTOGRAVURES FROM
ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS
DESIGNED FROM INDIAN
SOURCES BY E. STUART
HARDY



LONDON
J. M. DENT & CO.
29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.
MDCCCXCIX

Incl 3304.3

~~Incl 3304.3~~
~~IV, 5699~~



Mary Cassel Gould

INTRODUCTION

WE possess but very little of true Epic Poetry, and the wonder is that we should possess any. Of course if we define an epic as a poem which in the form of continuous narrative celebrates the achievements of one or more heroic personages of history or tradition, any poet may write an epos. But if by epos are meant early unwritten narrative poems celebrating incidents of heroic tradition, we can easily understand why their number should be so small as it is. Strictly speaking, I know of one true epic poem only, the Kalewala of the Fins, and possibly the Kalewipoeg of the Estonians. These were preserved to the present day, and are still living in the mouths of the people. They were never written down till they were lately collected and fitted together, without any additions, by such men as Von Becker, Lönnrot, Castrén, and others. Lönnrot's first edition of the Kalewala in Finnish appeared in 1835, comprising about 12,000 verses in thirty-two songs. This was translated into Swedish by Castrén in 1841. In 1849, however, Lönnrot published a new edition, consisting of 22,793 verses in fifty songs, and a German translation by Schiefner appeared in 1857. More songs even, all forming integral parts of a large epic poem, have been discovered since the death of Castrén and Lönnrot. While we may perfectly trust the painstaking scholarship and conscientious accuracy of Castrén, Lönnrot, and other Finnish students in their treatment of these ancient popular poems of Finland, some doubt has been thrown on the perfect authenticity of the Estonian poems of Kalewipoeg as collected by Kreutzwald and translated into German

by Reinthal, 1857. They were found to be in a much more fragmentary state, and it is supposed that they were largely restored, while in the case of the Kalewala we possess the trustworthy copy of poems exactly as they were, and are still recited in Finland by old men and women in the presence of their Swedish auditors.

All other epic poems, after existing for an unknown length of time in the tradition of popular poets, have passed through what is called a *Diakéus*, a setting in order, a dressing or recension at the hands of later poets. The most perfect specimen of this kind of epic poetry exists in the two Homeric poems, the Iliad and Odyssey. How the component parts of these poems, such as the Cyclopeia, the story of the wooden horse at Troy, the Nekyia, the Doloneia, the Patrokleia, &c., had existed before they formed part of an Odyssey and Iliad, we can see in the case of Demodokos and other Aoidoi who sang these Aristeias at festivals, both public and private. But we have no trustworthy information as to how these poems came to be collected, whether their dialect and metre were changed in the schools of the Homeridæ, and at what time the first written copies of them were prepared and circulated. I doubt whether in Greece the very idea of a written literature existed much before 500 or 600 B.C., that is, before the first contact between West and East. There is the Greek alphabet, which tells us in the clearest way that the Greeks learnt their letters from the Phœnicians; but there is a long distance between a knowledge of the A B C and its employment for inscriptions, coins, and even for official treaties, and its use for literary purposes. I confess that the well-known passage at the end of the Phædrus gives me the impression as if even Plato had still a recollection of the time when literature was mnemonic only, and not yet written.

And if we look at the epic literature of other nations, we find much the same. The poem of the Nibelunge, such as we possess it, was composed and written down about A.D. 1200; but we see from the short ballads recording the fates of Sigurd and Brynhild, as preserved to us in the Edda, what the poems may have been like which were used as his materials by the unknown German Homer of the twelfth century.

Firdusi, the author of the Persian national epic, the Shâh Nâmeh, Book of Kings, about A.D. 1000, tells us himself what sources he consulted, and how he travelled about from village to village to collect the materials for his great poem.

We see, therefore, that the constituent elements of the epic poems which we possess—the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Nibelunge, and the Shâh Nâmeh—existed in oral tradition long before the invention of writing; that they were elaborated during what is called the Mnemonic Period of literature; and that they were reduced to their present form at a time when the art of alphabetic writing had been discovered, and had been applied, not only to inscriptions, but to poetry and other literary compositions; when, in fact, there were not only a few sculptors to engrave official documents, but a large public that could both read and write.

We must distinguish, therefore, between two kinds of epic poetry—one, the *Mnemonic*, as preserved intact in the Kalewala, and slightly recast in the Kalewipoeg; another, the *Literary*, which has passed through the hands of later poets, such as Iliad and Odyssey, the Nibelungenlied, and the Shâh Nâmeh. There is a third class of purely *Artificial* epic poems, written in imitation of these models, such as Virgil's *Æneid*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the *Lusjads* of Camœns, and, lastly, poems like Voltaire's *Henriade*. But these belong to quite a different sphere of poetry.

It is not likely that the number of true epic poems will ever

be increased, and the discovery of two epic poems in India was therefore a great event in the comparative study of ancient literature. These two Sanskrit poems were the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana. Leaving here out of consideration the Rāmāyana, the author of which, Valmiki, seems to have been more than a mere Diaskeuastes, we have the Mahābhārata, an ancient Sanskrit poem, which, in its present form, is said to consist of no less than 90,000 couplets, and was published at Calcutta in 1834-39 in four large quarto volumes. In its present form it can hardly be called a poem. It is an enormous poetical treasury, in which everything was thrown that could possibly be brought into connection with its original story. At first the Mahābhārata was the story of the Great War that had been waged in ancient times in India, but after the popular songs about that "Eighteen Days' War" had been collected, not only ancient stories, but ancient laws, customs, and philosophies were all incorporated into it. The date of its first composition is, of course, unknown, as much as the age of the single Aristeas of Iliad and Odyssey, or of the various Kvidhas of the Edda. All we can say is, that a collected poem, called not only Bhārata, but Mahābhārata, *i.e.* the great story of the war of the Bhāratas, is mentioned clearly in the Āvalāyana Sūtras, that is, before the rise of Buddhism in the sixth century B.C. But what the Mahābhārata was then, we shall of course never know. All we can say is that, when first collected, it must have been a mnemonic poem, composed before the art of writing was known in India, or, at all events, before it had been applied to literary purposes in that country. Extraordinary as it may seem to us that so enormous a poem should have been composed and handed down by memory only, the fact itself can hardly be doubted. It is in India, of all countries in the world, where we must study the facts about the extraordinary, and to us almost incredible, powers

of memory, before the art of writing was known and practised. There is, no doubt, an introductory chapter of our poem which tells us how, with the help of Ganesa, the Mahābhārata was written. But the absence of that chapter in a large number of MSS., more particularly, as Dr. Winternitz has shown, in the MSS. of the south of India, speaks for itself, and proves that the idea of the poem having been composed on paper was an after-thought, and may, in fact, serve to determine the time when writing for literary purposes became the custom in India. The poet is called Vyāsa, or *Krishna Dvaipāyana*, a name which means "arranger," from *vi* and *as*, to distribute, to extend; and whatever his date may have been, we may be certain that his work, the Mahābhārata, was a genuine product of the Mnemonic Period of Indian literature.

Life seems too short to read such a gigantic poem as a whole, and various attempts have been made from time to time to reduce it to its original dimensions. The most promising was to follow the indications of an old Index or *Anukramanikā*, incorporated in the poem itself. But if we add the number of couplets of each book, as stated in that preface, we are still left with a poem of no less than 85,000 couplets. It is impossible to enjoy such a poem, however beautiful it may be in some of its stories; nor can we imagine that the original poet, or the original collector even, contemplated such a monstrous production. The original subject was the war between two branches of the same royal family, the Bhārata princes. These Bhāratas are mentioned as an ancient and most powerful race in the north of India as early as the Brāhmana period, for in the *Satapathabrāhmana*, xiii. 5, 4, we read, "The greatness of the Bhāratas neither the men before nor those after them have ever attained; nor did the seven tribes of men, even as mortal man does not touch the sky with his flanks."