# Scripting, Adapting and Pastiche: Re-visioning Mahabharata in the Cinematic Presentations of B. R Chopra (1988) and Siddharth Kumar Tewary (2013)

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**Abstract**

*Mahabharata*, the great epic of Hindu mythology hints the initiation of new era in the chapters of history. The proposed paper is an attempt to project the true historical facts related to the epic and the various adaptations in cinematic screen in order to meet the dynamic demands of the society. With the addition of exaggerating elements expose the politics of some hegemonic structures of the echelon world. The cinematography mirrors the concept of prevailing social practicality resulting in the revision and re-revision of the Indian Mythological texts, which may at times be responsible for the disorientation of real essence of the scripts. Further, with the adoption of innovating style which is known as pastiche in literary sense purposefully makes a piece of art more appealing through imitation from the original source of the work.

*Keywords*: Initiation; Exaggerating; Hegemonic; Disorientation; Imitation.

*Mahabharata*, the name connotatively amalgamation of two sanskrit words *viz.* maha stands for great, massive, mighty, famous derived from the root word *mahayoga* which depicts the spiritual practice in Buddhism and the word bharata means agni and attaining knowledge. So, both the terms hints about the great fire of attaining revenge and seeking knowledge for the true purpose of human existence. Hence, *Mahabharata* is a great epic consisting of heroic battles but it has controversy regarding its authenticity among intellectuals. The research and deep introspection by some researchers and archaeologists has compelled them to make remark that some events narrated in it are mythical in nature. Hansmuk Dhirajlal Sankalia, an Indian archaeologist wrote an article in *The Times of India* resultant, D. C Sircar, a historian took an initiative to ponder over it seriously. Some researchers have analysed that there were two capitals in north India *viz.* Indraprastha and Hasinapur although archaeologists did not find any evidence but it was believed that their location was around Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. But still analysts have doubt regarding the accuracy of events in the storyline of Mahabharata which later on became a matter of controversy and debate among many social scientists. The paradox of Indian history is that it did not narrate any events related to it but people have special place in their hearts regarding epic *Mahabharata*. It is matter of great concern as no traces were evident in the ancient and Vedic history regarding the authenticity of Mahabharata as no places were found during the excavation process by archaeologists. Hence, the study projected the wide lacuna and created moral dilemma among intellectuals. Moreover, epic and myth are closely interwoven and interrelated. Epic is something which is splendid and grand in nature and contains action of historical significance. A great analyst observes that:

> Mahabharata went through the stage of the classical heroic epic and was partly transformed into a religious didactic épopée. But during this process, the Indian epic paradoxically retained some features typical of the epic folklore at the archaic stage. And it seems to me that this very fact constitutes the true uniqueness of the Mahabharata. There is no other epic in the world which combines in the same way the features of all three main historical stages of development: archaic, classical heroic, late epic . . . The archaic epic is characterised by a very strong involvement of the epic narrative in the system of myths and rituals. (Vassilkov 1995).

So, myth revolves around the story of supreme beings which contains either historical or fictional elements. A critic makes an observation about it, "Myth is the socio- cultural oral repository of stories of creation and civilization. Epic is an established literary genre, whereas

myth is a social practice."(Jha 2016). Thus, there is no proper definition defining myth in layman language. Abhishek Kosta, an author in his book *The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Study in Myths and Gender* observes about myth,

> [. . .] myths are not just tales about gods and goddesses. They project a culture, its abiding values, mores and philosophy and act as a means of their transmission across generations. Not through life-like reproductions of the portrayed subjects, however. To use the language of art, the school that myths do not belong to is realism. Myth use technique of surrealism, impressionism and cubism . . . It is basically a revolution against all restraints on the free function of the human mind. These restraints may include the logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions. It ensures the unhampered operation of the deep mind, which is the source of valid knowledge and art . . . Thus myths, so to speak, bring out the many dimensions of the varieties of a culture that a realistic depiction would fail to reveal. (Kosta 2012)

Hence, "mythos" is basically any story which can be real or imaginary depending upon context in socio-cultural group in order to establish certain practices and standards in society. It is common belief system that Mahabharata war initiated during the end of Dwaparyuga when Arjuna was enlightened by Lord Krishna with divine knowledge in the battlefield as mentioned in holy *Bhagwat Geeta* which was a conversation between Lord Krishna and Pandava prince Arjuna who did not want to continue the battle and felt depressed as considering the aftermath of the war. The dialogue between Lord Krishna and prince Arjuna is the reminder call to humanity about the very purpose of human existence in the world which incorporates the idea of *Samkhya- Yoga* philosophy. So, philosophy and theology are engrossed in the realm of literature.

In order to capture the attention of the masses some people have deliberately tried to project the reality in their own way and in order to serve their purpose they never hesitate to use the fictional elements in the epical works. So, the various adaptations made on the cinematic screens to entertain the masses without bothering about the cultural legacy of the great work.

*Mahabharata* contains bulk of stories which are related to struggle between Pandavas and Kaurava princes and credited Ved Vyasa who himself called it as framing *itihasa* in mythology and the beginning of *Guru-shishya tradition* which reveals about the relationship between the teacher and his disciple. The story line of the Mahabharata was around 400 BCE. Some critics termed it as the longest poem in history. It contains more than 100,000 hymns and 200,000 couplets which gives the impression of fifth Vedas in great Indian traditional

heritage. The story line of the epic starts with the story of Shantanu who was the ruler of Hastinapur who married to Ganga and had a son named Devavrat. Later on, Shantanu was in love with Satyavati but her father was very hypocritical in nature and did not allow her to marry Shantanu unless he promised her in future Satyavati's son and his descendants would be the king of Shantanu's kingdom but king was reluctant to execute it. Devavrat intentionally denounced all the worldly pleasures for the sake of his father and vowed to lead a life of celibacy so that his father and Satyavati would marry without contemplating about its consequences. Thus, Devavrat due to his *bheeshm partigya* came to be known in history as Bheeshm. By the time Shantanu and Satyavati got married and they were blessed with two sons. But after sometimes Shantanu died hence the affairs of the kingdom was managed by Satyavati and Bheeshm together. The elder son of Satyavati died in skirmish with grandharvas that's why younger son named Vichitravirya ascended the throne. But he was also died childless. Hence, Satyavati invited her son Vyasa who was born to her before her marriage to king and a child of sage Parashar.  Being step son of Shantanu he was considered his son and descendant of Kuru clan who ruled Hastinapur. Hence, the two widowed queens of Vichitravirya each had a son from Vyasa through *Niyoga* custom. So, the elder queen was blessed with a blind son who was called Dhritarashtra and younger queen had healthy child who was named Pandu. The maid of two queens also had a son of Vyasa named Vidur. Bheeshm did not turn any stone of bringing these children with utmost care. When they grew up according to the law the elder prince was to be crowned but being disabled the law forbade him to be the king of the state so the younger prince Pandu was crowned. By the time, Dhritarashtra got married to Gandhari, and Pandu married with Madri and Kunti. After giving the responsibility of kingdom to Dhritarashtra, Pandu with his wives had gone to the forest. After some years, Kunti returned with the dead bodies of Pandu and Madri with her five children who were born to both the queens through *Niyog* tradition from gods, the eldest prince was born of Dharma, the second was born of Vayu, the third prince was born of Indra and the remaining two were born of the Ashvins. Dhritarashtra and Gandhari also had one hundred one children out of which hundred was sons and a daughter. Now, all the one hundred five princes were getting education in Dronaachariya ashram with other pupils such as, Karna who was the son of the Suta clan which resultant the hostility was developed between the sons of Dhritarashtra called the Kauravas and the sons of Pandu. Hence, the cold war was begun between them. These small skirmishes later on were responsible for the war

between the Pandavas and Kauravas. So, the seeds of rivalry were begun to germinate among them.

In the war between Pandavas and Kauravas the high casualties occurred on both the sides which lasted for eighteen days. At the end Pandavas won the war. Yudhishthir was the crowned king of both the kingdoms of Indraprastha and Hastinapur for thirty- six years. Then, handed over all the affairs to Parikshit who was the son of Abhimanyu they moved towards Himalayas. The entire story of *Mahabharata* was narrated by a disciple of Vyasa known as Vaishampayan.

The above mentioned narrative is considered to be original historical script of the *Mahabharata* which B.R Chopra has tried to project in his cinematic adaptation of *Mahabharata.* B. R. Chopra along with his son Ravi Chopra had taken the initiative to present the television series based on Mahabharata epic on doordarshan which was broadcast in 1990. Its script was written by Pandit Narendra Sharma and Rahi Masoom Raza which was based on the story of Vyasa. It is considered the most ever successful series of *Mahabharata* as compared to other adaptations of Mahabharata. The storyline of the *Mahabharata* serial revolves around Kaurvas, Pandavas and the childhood days of Lord Krishna. The serial began with Emperor Bharata who showed the birth of Bhishma and his pledge, the birth of Pandu, kauravas and Pandavas, the episode of swayamvara, the enlightenment of Arjuna by Lord Krishna. Hence, all these episodes revealed about the real glimpses of historical description based on facts and figures in history. On the other hand the recent cinematic adaptation of Siddharth Kumar Tewary of *Mahabharata* arouses the spirit of inquisitiveness among the younger audiences to know more about it. The lifelike characters which are portrayal on the cinematic screens somewhere resemble with the contemporary times in appearances and attitudes. The later version of *Mahabharata* by Siddharth Kumar Tewary projected his characters are more alluring in nature to satisfy the growing demands of the present day society. In B. R. Chopra's version the emphasis was to reveal the reality to society whereas, the later version focused to gain the maximum TRP in order to make large profit that's why some critics has called it *masala* based version with the application of great intensifying graphic effects. Jean Baudrillard in the book *Simulacra and Simulation* hints that the prevalent sign which symbolizes the certain icons of archaic times is need to be reconsidered in the context of postmodern culture. Through which we interpret the modified forms of the icons/ sign that change from the real to hyperreal and gives vent to the representation of simulation in the context of present day society. "In this model, the screen becomes a hyperreal vehicle for travelling across a simulated world. A large number of Internet "guide" books make use of this geographical metaphor, evoking images of

navigation and exploration" (Nunes 1995). In literary terms the device which is known as pastiche revolves around somewhere this creative critical practice of initiating grandiloquent innovation in the artistic world of the creation. It is considered as, ". . . conspicuous presence, we may, however, regard this contemporary stylistic revolution as constituting one of the few markers of aesthetic postmodernism shared by various interpretative communities that participate in the making of cultural consciousness" (Hoesterey 1995). Later on, it enters in the vast canvas of cinematography and used as cinematic device which introduces some changes in existing artistic creations by adding gleaming looks and magnificent effect to make the show appealing to the taste of masses. The projection of *Mahabharata* story in cinematic screen contain many gaps which raise questions among the critics such as, the various characters were projected to serve the very purpose of pastiche, the character of Shakuni who is quite appealing and interesting in nature but the reality is far from his characterization. Shakuni was shown as handicap and hypocritical but he was not a handicap in reality but he was shown in serial as a villain who was physically deformed and played an important role with Duryodhan against Pandavas. Hence, the wrong depiction of the character ruined the real essence of work. In an interview on television Gufi Paintal who had played the role of Shakuni admitted that he was instructed to deliberately play physical deformed role. Thus, the serial makers had misled the masses by exaggerating the fact that Shakuni himself had hurt his leg and had taken a vow to destroy Hastinapur. It was also a myth that the dice game which Shakuni used to play was made of the bones of his father that's why no one could win from him. Although he helped Duryodhan many times but sometimes he used to advise him not to be jealous of Pandavas but on screen persona he was shown very negative character.

The other character Abhimanyu has projected differently in both the versions in earlier version he was shown as a child who could not bear the physical pain inflicted on him by Duryodhan. But in later version he was shown as a great warrior and no one dared to fight with him as it would be difficult to defeat him. Hence, such projection has raised many questions on the integrity of the cinema. Moreover, the battle scenes are inspired from the exaggerating and heightening elements. In order to catch the intention of audience many innovating techniques incorporates which mislead the innocent people about the glorious past. The characters in later version of the *Mahabharata* seems to be unnatural as by giving glamorous looks and emphasis is given on the projection of external beauty rather than unveiling the real essence of the characters which ultimately deteriorates the credibility of the work. Further, the study has shown that lot of melodramatic elements were introduced in the later version such as the

character of Satyavati has been represented as a selfish lady whose main purpose is to get the throne but in reality she remained loyal to the throne throughout of her life. Many other insignificant things which need to be checked such as heavy ornamentation and make up worn by female characters somewhere reflects that the large amount of money has been wasted in promoting pseudo materialism.

## Conclusion

The irony is that people watch serial by considering these serials as the reality of the scriptures but makers never hesitate to use fictional elements for gaining monetary profits rather than considering about the values and culture of the society. No doubt, the story of the *Mahabharata* has been retold many times at various fronts; it has been adapted in different cinematic screens but makers must project a real picture to society so that the integrity of our great cultural heritage be maintained.

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