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Appendix-100

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Appendix-100

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Unit-I(a)

THE MAHABHARATA: 'THE DICING' AND 'SEQUEL TO DICING'

Usha Anand

STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study material are to: -

i) enable the student to get an overview of the general narrative of the *Mahabharata* and an idea of how to go about interpreting all the complex themes, imagery, incidents, philosophical concepts of destiny, the Vedic point of view, dharma etc. in the prescribed text.

ii) specifically enable him/her to interpret episodes and characters not just literally but from a symbolic and moral point of view.

iii) see the link between the individual's interests and those of the larger world around him/her, introduce him to the concept of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

iv) do a detailed analysis of the episode of the game of dice, a pivotal episode in the narrative of the *Mahabharata*, and to see how it is crucial to the entire story of the epic.

v) introduce students to modern interpretations of major pivotal characters of the *Mahabharata* as representing human traits as well as gender-oriented roles. In other words, to link the epic with modern life.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

1.2.1 Prescribed Sections of the *Mahabharata*

A look at the syllabus shows that you have to closely examine three excerpts from the epic and this part of the study material takes up 'The Dicing' and 'The Sequel to Dicing' from Book 2, *Sabha Parva* Section XLVI-LXXII for a detailed study. It is an extract from K.M. Ganguli's translation, one of the most widely accepted English renderings of the complete epic. When you read this section, you are getting a glimpse into the real world of the *Mahabharata* as was probably intended by the composer Vyasa and subsequent bards who recited the epic in the oral tradition. It has all the human drama, action, insight into human behaviour, realpolitik, intrigue, cunning, that make this Indian epic such a favourite with all those people who have anything to do with art forms like literature, dance, drama, and also culture.

Moreover, these two sections are vital to the plot of the epic and have tremendous bearing on both, the causal chain of events in the epic, and the behaviour of the protagonists.

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Wronged Draupadi seeks revenge and Bhim's anger motivates him to perform gory deeds of murder and killing, several years after this incident.

Draupadi is a woman who through her intelligence combined with a remarkable sense of integrity raises a legal issue which becomes a moral dilemma for those present at the sabha. Whether Yudhishtira, a man who has already lost himself in the game of dice, had the power to stake his wife, is a question which none present in the assembly can answer satisfactorily. And, till today, the dilemma seems unresolved.

Draupadi lives by the social norms and conventions of her times. But when she is wronged, she protests even though her protests, her intelligence, her moral integrity are of no avail in her hour of crisis. In the present times, our sense of gender- awareness helps us to sympathize with Draupadi far more than her contemporaries might have sympathized with her. The feminist point of view however always conflicts with the male point of view.

With some of these guidelines before you, please read on.

1.2.2 The Scope

The *Mahabharata* is usually accepted as an encyclopaedia of ancient Indian culture and civilization, next in importance only to the Vedas, and is often referred to as the fifth Veda. Although the central narrative of the epic is the struggle for power between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the content of the poem is vast and varied. Its structure is very intricate. Its content has passages of philosophical poetry, poetry of the metaphysical imagination, and its appeal ranges from the purely literal to the highly symbolic and spiritual. There is the physical Kurukshetra and there is the Kurukshetra of the mind. In certain passages of great depth, it speaks of the subtle form of the soul and sets forth in detail, the many paths that are open for soul experience.

Vyasa who is considered the composer of the *Mahabharata* unravels the mystery of the creation, of the Veda, which is wisdom itself, of Yoga with all its metaphysical background of wealth, Desire and Duty. He includes the wisdom of various disciplines or sciences like Ayurveda, Dhanurveda or the science of the bow, Sthapatyaveda or the science of architecture and engineering, and many others.

That the *Mahabharata* was intended as a grand treatise on life is indicated when Vyasa tells Brahma in the *Mahabharata* itself:

> "O divine Brahma, by me a poem hath been composed which is greatly respected. The mystery of the Veda, and what other subjects have been explained by me; the various rituals of the Upanishads with the Angas; formed by me and named after the

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three divisions of time, past, present, and future; the determination of the nature of decay, fear, disease, existence, and non-existence, a description of creeds and of the various modes of life; rule for the four castes, and the import of all the Puranas; an account of asceticism and of the duties of a religious student; the dimensions of the sun and moon, the planets, constellations, and stars, together with the duration of the four ages; the Rik, Sama and Yajur Vedas; also the Adhyatma; the sciences called Nyaya, Orthœphy and Treatment of diseases; charity and Pasupatadharma; birth celestial and human, for particular purposes; also a description of places of pilgrimage and other holy places of rivers, mountains,, forests, the ocean, of heavenly cities and the kalpas; the art of war; the different kinds of nations and languages: the nature of the manners of the people; and the all-pervading spirit;--all these have been represented. But, after all, no writer of this work is to be found on earth."

Brahma replies to Vyasa and pays his own tribute to the encyclopaedic epic, saying:

"I esteem thee for thy knowledge of divine mysteries, before the whole body of celebrated Munis distinguished for the sanctity of their lives. I know thou hast revealed the divine word, even from its first utterance, in the language of truth. Thou hast called thy present work a poem, wherefore it shall be a poem. There shall be no poets whose works may equal the descriptions of this poem, even, as the three other modes called Asrama are ever unequal in merit to the domestic Asrama. Let Ganesa be thought of, O Muni, for the purpose of writing the poem." (The *Mahabharata*, Book 1: Adi Parva: Section I).

1.2.3 Evolution of the *Mahabharata*

You are aware that the *Mahabharata* is an epic– a '*Mahakavya*'. But as students of literature, we must remember that this epic began as an *itihasa*, a primarily historical work. Only, the method of its transmission was oral. It was passed on from generation to generation. Bards, minstrels, rhapsodists are all people associated with the tradition of oral transmission in times when the written form was rare and difficult to prepare or procure. An eminent scholar Dandekar, talking about the *Mahabharata* says:

"It appears to me that the historical basis of the *Mahabharata* is quite slender, diffuse and not easily identifiable. A commonplace family feud is subjected to epic magnification with all its hyperboles, miracles, mystification, symbolization, idealization and universalisation. the *Mahabharata*, I submit, is essentially an epic poem- with emphasis on both the words 'epic' and 'poem'- and not a historical document in the

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restricted sense of the term. So, in a sense, it is an epic born out of an 'itihasa'" (Dandekar, p.16).

Now, when we look at it as an epic poem, we need to understand its evolution. In order to come to terms with the vastness of the epic we would do well to remember that the *Mahabharata* is over eight times the combined length of the western epics of classical literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is, in its present form perceived as a blend of history and mythology and constitutes an outstanding record of the collective conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious of man. However, it is generally accepted among scholars that it evolved over three stages of composition and compilation. An eminent scholar, Professor U.K. Gokak tells us that "*Jaya*" was the name given to Vyasa's *itihasa*. The text composed by Vyasa was named *Jaya* referring to the triumph of good, the victory of the Pandavas' Dandekar, p. 2). This original composition had about eight thousand stanzas and was recited by Vyasa to his son Suka. **From the point of view of narrative technique**, providing a listener is a literary device of providing an audience or listener for the narrator. It also gives plausibility to a poetic composition being recited in keeping with the prevalent oral tradition.

Vyasa the sage composer also had a disciple called Vaishampayana. This disciple was given the task of expanding the epic *Jaya* into the *Bharata* containing many more sections, legendary stories and treatises.

These additions led to the *Bharata* being considered an *Itihasa Purana*, a step ahead of the *itihas Jaya. Jaya* was recited to Suka. *Bharata* was recited by Vaishampayana to Janmejaya and others at a Yagya at Takshashila for snake sacrifice to avenge the killing of Parikshit by snakebite.

At this point it is important to remember that this audience is the lineage of Arjuna, one of the Pandavas. Arjuna's son was Abhimanyu; Abhimanyu's son was Parikshit and Parikshit's son was Janmejaya who wanted to avenge his father's death by killing all the *nagas* but was persuaded not to do so. So, while the original *Jaya*, was only 8000 stanzas, the poem recited to Janmejaya was *Bharata*, a poem of 24,000 stanzas. *Bharata* tells about the glory of Janmejaya's ancestors. It is also called the *Bharatsamhita*. In the language of scholarship, a new, revised version of a text is called a recension. So, the *Bharata* is the second recension of the primary epic *Jaya***.** Scholars believe that this second recension, like Jaya, was pro-Pandava and pro-Krishna in theme and treatment.

Among the listeners present at the recitation of the *Bharata* was a bard Romaharshana. He recited a further expanded third recension of the story to his son Ugrasravas. This third

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verse version called the *Mahabharata* was recited at the twelve-year sattra in the Naimisa Forest in the presence of several sages.

The existence of several recensions is typical of the oral epic. The bard or singer improvised with the help of formulae and patterns of expression and themes while rhapsodists recited songs learnt by heart.

1.2.4 Narrative Technique

The evolution of the *Mahabharata* described in the preceding segment has a direct bearing on the narrative technique of this epic. Considering the immensity of its inclusive range, the *Mahabharata* is considered a Book of Books. The vastness of its time frame which includes several generations justifies the many narrators of the poem. You may note that in a sense, it begins with the end. Descendants of the Pandavas, having been persuaded not to perform the Yagya for mass killing of serpents wish to hear about the glory of their ancestors. the *Mahabharata* is a highly enhanced narrative of the glory of the entire clan, the descendants of **Shantanu** and **Satyavati**. The two rival factions, the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**, stand for two polarized aspects of the moral perception of life, material and spiritual. In the process of expressing this expansive world view, the epic has to resort to multiple narrators and narrative methods.

The most obvious aspect to be noted is that the final narrator **Ugrasravas** refers every now and then to the person whose recitation he depends upon. "Vaishampayana said" is his way of telling the listeners that his narrative is an old narrative of history, folklore, mythology that has come down to him through generations. Having listeners ask questions is a method of giving the narrator/ rhapsodist a chance to bring in more content, philosophical, spiritual or material. More stories, more characters, a greater range of material is thus included in the recitation. This is often described by critics as the practice of having stories within stories and yet more stories. There are plots and sub-plots and sub-sub-plots.

At this point it is pertinent to recall the names of the known narrators of the epic narrative.

- There is **Vyasa–**the original composer and narrator for whom Ganesha was the scribe.
- The next significant narrator was **Vaishampayana**–who narrated Vyasa's tale to Janmejaya, the great-grandson of the Pandava, Arjuna.
- This narrative was overheard by a Santi or bard called Romaharshana who passed it on to his son **Ugrasravas**–who narrated it to Shaunaka and other sages of the Naimisha forest.

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Coming to the narrators within the narrative itself, we have the very interesting role of Sanjaya who is endowed with the divine gift of *divya drishti* which enables him to describe, in great detail, the action taking place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. He describes the war to the blind Dhritarashtra and indirectly to us too as modern day readers/listeners. Within the framework of lineage and caste, Sanjaya himself was a bard. The minstrels who narrated the epic were known as 'sutas'.

'Sutas' were the illegitimate offspring of Kshatriya royalty. For instance, Karna and Vidura are intelligent people, sons of royalty, but are called Sutas. 'Karna is a major character in the epic. He is the son of Kunti and the Sun god but, abandoned by Kunti, is raised by a charioteer. Vidura, the most dispassionate royal advisor to the Kauravas, half-brother of Dhritarashtra, is the son of a royal maid and Vyasa. Both these characters are examples of 'Sutas'.

1.2.5 How do Stories Add Meaning to a Narrative?

A popular yet serious narrative like the *Mahabharata* necessarily contains abstract ideas. Stories enable a narrator to convey those abstract ideas in situational terms so that in the event of an oral recitation they are understood immediately and instantly. Critics who try to explain the power of stories say that like fiction or poetry, stories enable us to experience feelings, thoughts, emotions and images which may lie dormant in our subconscious mind.

In a sense, stories reflect a part of our inner selves, helping us to understand and heal ourselves. Complex and difficult experiences of life can be conveyed through stories. So can a great deal of wisdom.

To understand the power of a rich yet simple story, let us briefly recall the story of the Yaksha in the *Mahabharata*. Yaksha is the Lord of a lake. Nakula, the youngest Pandava is out in the forest to hunt a deer when he suddenly feels very thirsty. Approaching the lake, he hears a mysterious voice say that he can only drink water from the lake after answering the Yaksha's questions. However, seeing no one around, Nakula using his cupped hands drinks water from the lake but immediately drops down dead. One by one all the brothers come to the lake, looking for the one who has gone before. The last one to reach is Yudhishtira who is taken aback to find his four brothers lying dead on the ground. Like his brothers before him, Yudhishtira is also addressed by the Yaksha but unlike his brothers, immediately lets go of the water.

Appearing before Yudhishtira, the Yaksha asks him a number of questions which Yudhishtira answers very wisely. The questions encompass the Vedas, society, the nature of the world, philosophy, death; almost anything under the Sun. Impressed with Yudhishtira's

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answers, the Yaksha reveals his true identity. He is Yama, also known as Dharma, Yudhishtira's father. As a reward, all four brothers of Yudhishtira are restored to life.

This brief recapitulation of a story is intended only to show you how a vast range of wisdom can be effectively conveyed and encompassed through a story of a few pages.

1.2.6 The Organic Unity of the *Mahabharata*

There has been endless comment on the diversity of the *Mahabharata*. There are no limitations of time, place or action but it has also been conceived as a tree which grows out of a seed and grows with its roots spreading underground and its branches spreading in every direction.

In his commentary on the *Mahabharata*, Vidya Niwas Misra gives a detailed analogy:

"The conceptualization as a tree signifies one thing, namely, that all material within the epic is organically related and is one totality. Nothing is grafted from outside. The main trunk of the story lends itself to branch out into sub-stories. The seed of poetic structure remains one. The trunk is one, the major branches are defined and well developed, only they continue to leaf out and blossom. When the fruit forms, the tree achieves its final shape- the tree of the *Mahabharata*. Whatever additions or deletions take place, they happen before fruition" (Dandekar, p. 20).

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1.2.7 Check Your Progress

1. List the three stages of the evolution of the *Mahabharata*
2. Would it be correct to say that the *Mahabharata* is a record of a historical event?
3. List the various narrators of the *Mahabharata* in the correct order
4. What is the purpose of having stories within stories in the epic?

1.2.8 The Moral Framework of the *Mahabharata*

1.2.8.1 Dharma

David Crystal in the Cambridge Paperback Encyclopedia describes dharma as, "In Hinduism, the universal law that applies to the Universe, human society, and the individual is both a general code of ethics applicable to all, and a moral law specific to an individual's station in life."

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Yudhishtira, the protagonist of the *Mahabharata* is the son of Dharma and himself Dharma incarnate. He is constantly faced with dilemmas but always applies the test of dharma to his actions. Critics have pointed out that this epic is not essentially about courage, valour or physical prowess but about spiritual strength, flexibility and the ability to face life courageously. Yudhishtira's judgment and commitment to Dharma are tested time and again but he always abides by Dharma. The Yaksha of the lake puts him through a trial but in both thought and action, he is able to satisfy the embodiment of Dharma: his answers to the Yaksha are steeped in acceptance of the universal law and his choice of his youngest step brother, Sahdev, Madri's son, as the one to be brought back to life, reveal his commitment to the principles of Dharma.

So does his willingness to bear the consequences of his choice, even if it is an unfairly inflicted and unfairly won game of dice. The episode of Yudhishtira standing at the gates of heaven in his earthly body with a dog in tow is known to all. His refusal to enter without the dog is an act of dharma. He refuses to abandon his companion, thus abiding by Dharma.

Coming back to the "universal law" of Crystal's definition, the *Mahabharata* shows us that the truth of an individual, of a society, of a community or of a nation has to be in consonance with cosmic and universal truth. It cannot be merely theorized. Dharma is put to test in everyday life, and there is no absolute dharma. The dharma of crisis situations is different from the dharma of everyday life. If an action contributes to universal good, it conforms to dharma even if it does not conform to societal norms. When choices are to be made between conflicting dharmas, a great deal of thought, concentration and judgment have to be exercised.

1.2.8.2 Destiny

The *Mahabharata* depicts the suffering of the righteous man. On the face of it the epic appears to believe that the irreversible destiny of man is to suffer But, very perceptively the scholar Vidya Niwas Misra points out that there is a notion of the destined, but only to dramatize human weakness. One who is not willing to face suffering as a consequence of his own action makes a scapegoat of destiny. When suffering is unbearable, blaming fate is a big help. When Draupadi comes to Kunti for blessings, Kunti says: "Daughter, give birth to sons with good fate and stars. Do not give birth to the ones who are merely brave and learned. My sons are both brave and learned, but not fortunate. They are wandering in the jungles helplessly." This admonition does not mean that Kunti wants cowards and dullards as her grandsons. It only points to her unbearable anguish at the fate her sons have met. Won't they

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ever know peace and happiness, she wonders! This instance is not a validation of destiny. It is only an expression of anguish.

If destiny does take its course in the *Mahabharata*, it is due to some karmic deed of one's own. If a curse is inflicted, that curse is self-earned by some slip or folly. Acting judiciously brings peace of mind and makes suffering bearable. A conscientious person introspects to see if he has made compromises or whether he has bowed to someone who is unjust, for personal promotion. He experiences contentment even if he gets a little without causing suffering to others, without aligning with villains or giving up the path of virtue.

In the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira's willingness to accept just five villages for himself and his Pandava brothers is a case in point. But his efforts to avoid a full-fledged conflict with the Kauravas prove futile as Duryodhana is unwilling to give them even a needle point of land.

The *Mahabharata* teaches us that the vices of envy, lust, anger, greed, pride and attachment are quick to propagate but produce impermanent results. Godly virtues, though slow to grow, are lasting. In the ultimate analysis, the path to Moksha lies through fortitude and forbearance.

1.2.8.3 Check Your Progress

1. Briefly explain the concept of Dharma as explored in the *Mahabharata*. Is it absolute or does it vary according to one's situation in life?
2. Would you agree with the view that destiny is directly linked to the consequences of one's actions?
3. If one is destined to suffer how can he/she make that suffering bearable?

1.3 THE DICING': A DETAILED STUDY

1.3.1 The Game of Dice in the Assembly Hall

This is one of the sections of the epic listed for detailed study. As such you should be able to explain any lines or episodes even if you see them in isolation. For this, we need to keep some things in mind. Recall what was mentioned in the Introduction. Remember that what we are reading is Ugrasravas's rendering of the *Mahabharata*. That is why you often see,

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"Vaishampayana again said—" Ugrasravas is quoting Vaishampayana who is repeating what Yudhishtira or Draupadi or Duryodhana or Dhritarashtra or Vidur or any of the other characters said in the assembly. To get the reference of the narrators of the three recensions of the *Mahabharata* right, please refer to section 2.3 of the 'Introduction' to this study material.

Coming to the book itself, let us place it in sequential perspective. Having set up a capital in a new city at Khandavprastha which they render into Indraprastha as opposed to Hastinapur over which the Kauravas preside, Yudhishtira establishes suzerainty over a very large number of barons (rulers) in north India. He then seeks to legitimize his authenticity by perfoming a Rajsuya Yagya to which all the barons of various Kingdoms are invited and pay tribute in acknowledgement of Yudhistiras supremacy. The only two states/rulers from whom tribute is not received are king Dhrupada (father of Draupadi, and an ally, by marriage, of the Pandavas) and Krishna who had helped the Pandavas to slay Sisupala, the powerful king who had subdued 86 out 101 barons of Aryan lineage in Northern India of those times, i.e. in the second millenium B.C. When the Pandavas hold such an important ceremony as a Rajsuya Yagya it is natural that their Kaurava cousins from Hastinapur are also invited. However, the visit leaves the Kauravas jealous at the sheer wealth amassed and the splendour of the new capital, its palace and hall. After all, Dhritrashtra had sent them away to seek a new life from scratch in Khandavaprastha. They had done well and with the help of Maya, a demon who was also an architect, set up a splendid capital. It is after this visit that Duryodhana descends into a sulk and when asked, reveals to Sakuni, his maternal uncle, the cause of his unhappiness. As it is revealed that jealousy over the wealth and property of his Pandava cousins is the cause of Duryodhana's unhappiness, the cunning, scheming Sakuni devises the ploy of inviting them to a game of dice to defraud them of their wealth. The plan is conveyed to Dhritrashtra who has to give permission for the game of dice to be held in the assembly hall in the presence of the family elders and other important people. He is initially hesitant but is subsequently prevailed upon to dispatch Vidura with the invitation. Many questions have been asked about why Yudhistira accepted, but the answer seems to be that he was simply following a code of conduct or a social convention which dictated that a game of dice could not be declined. Van Buitenen in his introduction to the *Mahabharata* indicates that dicing is a part of the rajasuya rituals when he says "Yudhishtira had not so far been at all fond of gambling—we have seen quite a bit of him now—and can hardly be regarded as under a private compulsion to rise to any game". Nevertheless, he submits, though grudgingly: "Once challenged, I cannot refuse." Once we accept the dicing as an integral part of rajasuya, in the Assembly Hall, as well as the ritual manuals, Yudhishtira is not at all the statue with the clay feet, the paragon of rectitude with the sudden tragic flaw. The text itself

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does not condemn Yudhishtira for his gaming. Of course, if the gambling had been outside Yudhishtira's universe of law, the authors could easily have dropped the game from their version of the rajasuya, but in a way this would have gone against the spirit of the *Mahabharata* as a whole. It has often been remarked that the epic is a series of precisely stated problems imprecisely and therefore inconclusively resolved, with every resolution raising a new problem, until the very end, when the question remains: whose is heaven, and whose is hell? The point counterpoint is typical of the assembly hall as well: suzerainty achieved, and then gambled away.

Rather than dropping the Dicing or treating it as perfunctorily as do the ritual manuals, the authors have seized upon the dicing rite of the vedic ceremony as a ritually legitimate, even prescribed, way of swinging the doubt from Yudhishtiras apparently unassailable position to the claims of the Kauravas. With a masterly stroke of composition, the dead letter of the Vedic game is dramatically revived. Meanwhile, Yudhishtra remains the king Dharma he had not been too happy before about. For this ambition to become samrat, he is now prepared to go the bitter end.

And bitter it is. After an epical losing streak he finds himself obliged to stake his brothers, himself, and Draupadi—obliged, it seems, by the rules of the game, which unfortunately are never explained. What we do gather, however, is that two parties, rather than two individuals play, for Duryodhana's uncle Sakuni may play for him; it is Duryodhana who pays in the stake. The two parties pay in the first stake in the same amount. The loser adds to his stake while the winner's presumably remains the same. It is not clear whether the entire stake stays in the game or the winner pockets the loser's last stake after each play.

Never stated but implicit is this game's rule that it will go through twenty plays which are presented as two phases of ten each. In the first ten plays Yudhishtira forfeits most of his possessions, and after the tenth Vidura, the benevolent uncle of the Pandavas makes an impassioned plea that the game be stopped. Vidura urges not Yudhishtira but Duryodhana's father to stop it and villifies Duryodhana for persisting in it. This would make no sense if Vidura considered Yudhishtira a free agent; it makes excellent sense if Yudhishtira is bound by the rules of his own Rajasuya and must rise to the challenge.

The game is carried on for another session of ten plays. Yudhishtra first loses untold millions in the eleventh play, in the twelfth all his cattle, in the thirteenth all his land, in the fourteenth the sons of Draupadi by the five Pandavas, in the fifteenth Nakula, in the sixteenth Sahadeva, in the seventeenth Bhima, in the eighteenth Arjuna, in the nineteenth himself. At the twentieth play the final one of the game, Yudhishtira stakes Draupadi. The audience

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groans and protests but does nothing to stop the play; evidently the game is to be a complete one, with a total winner and a total loser. But our authors, masters of doubt, have already planted a doubt. Draupadi is lost; she is subjected to indignities that shout for vengeance, she is disrobed but the power of her virtue replaces her sari; she also poses the ultimate riddle.

Had Yudhishtira staked and lost himself, she asks, before he staked me? If so, he had lost his freedom and, as a slave of the Kauravas, no longer owned her to stake.

Just then there begin many bad omens that portend a grim future for the Kauravas.

> "Vaisampayana continued,--"Just then, a jackal began to cry loudly in the homa-chamber of king Dhritarashtra's palace. And, O king, unto the jackal that howled so, the asses began to bray responsively. And terrible birds also, from all sides, began to answer with their cries. And Vidura conversant with everything and the daughter of Suvala, both understood the meaning of those terrible sounds. And Bhishma and Drona and the learned Gautama loudly cried,--*Swashti! Swashti*! Then Gandhari and the learned Vidura beholding that frightful omen, represented everything, in great affliction, unto the king.

When Dhritrashtra listens to the dreadful omens and is warned by Gandhari and Vidur, he becomes cautious. He realizes now that matters have gone too far and tries to retrieve the situation thus:

> "And the king (Dhritarashtra) thereupon said,-- 'Thou wicked-minded Duryodhana, thou wretch, destruction hath already overtaken thee when thou insultest in language such as this the wife of these bulls among the Kurus, especially their wedded wife Draupadi. And having spoken those words, the wise Dhritarashtra endued with knowledge, reflecting with the aid of his wisdom and desirous of saving his relatives and friends from destruction, began to console Krishna, the princess of Panchala, and addressing her, the monarch said,--'Ask of me any boon, O princess of Panchala, that thou desirest, Chaste and devoted to virtue, thou art the first of all my daughters-in-law." (*Sabha Parva*, Book II Section LXXII).

With the boons given to her Draupadi is able to free the five Pandavas from slavery and get back their lost wealth and kingdom. So, the Pandavas depart, free and still rich men.

1.3.2 The Status of Women

Having tried to understand the socio-cultural context of dicing, we are still left puzzled by Draupadi's plight in this episode. To understand how she is affected by Yudhishtira's losing her, we need to take a look at the status of women in Aryan society of these times. The

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Aryans who settled in North India after arriving there from Central Asia took the darker skinned natives captive and made them their slaves. In the Atharvaveda, dasi is the term used to describe alien domestic help. There is reference to the black dasi too. The term dasa or dasi thus originally had ethnic connotations although enslaved women in addition to domestic help could also be asked to provide sexual services.

In the *Mahabharata,* the ethnic dimension is not in evidence. A dasa/dasi denotes a human being under the complete control of a master. How did people become dasas or dasis ? The *Mahabharata* tells us about enslavement as a result of bet or as a result of defeat in gambling as in the case of Draupadi in the Sabha Parva. Women who were born in the family of slaves were also treated as such. Draupadi laments in the *Sabha Parva* that with the enslavement of the Pandavas their children too would be considered slaves. Dasa-bharya is the term used (Dhritarashtra uses this term for Draupadi) for the wife of the slave. This phrase probably implied the reduction into slavery of a free woman if she got married to a slave or was, by circumstances (like Yudhistira) reduced to slavery. A dasi was in no way protected from the unreasonable demands of her master. Dushsasana tells Draupadi in the Sabha Parvan. "Your husbands have lost you, henceforth you are only a dasi and you will have to serve the Kaurvas now. He further says, "It does not matter whether you are badly dressed or not dressed at all, you will have to come with me." Duryodhana could openly invite Draupadi to come and sit on his lap.

Draupadi's question regarding whether Yudhishthira had staked and lost himself before he staked her, has a background to it. A dasa/dasi had no right to personal belongings. So even in a culture where wives were 'owned' by their husbands, Draupadi could spot a "loophole" to avoid the disgrace in store for her. A dasi had to perform all types of tasks for her master and his household. Duryodhana demands that Draupadi take off her rich attire and assume that of a menial and clean his palace.

What sets the dasi apart from male slaves is that the dasi could also be asked to provide sexual services. That this fear of sexual violation of a dasi was very real is evident from Yudhistira's concern about how Draupadi would fare in Virata's palace where she would be under the guise of Sairandhri.

Another significant problem that the wise Draupadi touches upon is regarding her son Prativindhya. When she is offered a boon by Dhritarashtra she asks for the freedom of her husbands. One of the reasons she mentions is that she does not want her son to be known as the son of a slave. He has been the son of a king and it seems unbrearable that he might be reduced to being the son of a slave. The first boon procures the freedom of Yudhishthira, the

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second that of Bhimasena, Arjuna, Nakul and Sahdev. She declines a third boon. Even in that patriarchal society, a woman becomes the last refuge of her five husbands.

1.3.3 Check Your Progress

1. What is the cause of Duryodhan's unhappiness when he attends the Rajasuya Yagya organized by the Pandavas?
2. Why does Yudhishthira accept the challenge for a game of dice?
3. What are the rules of the game?
4. Why does Vidur appeal to Dhritrashtra and not Yudhishthira to stop the game?
5. At which stage is Draupadi put up as a stake?
6. What is her question to the Sabha?
7. Why is Draupadi called a dasi by Dushasana?
8. Why does Draupadi use her two boons to free her five husbands?

1.4 'SEQUEL TO DICING'

1.4.1 The Scheming Duryodhan Plans a Sequel

In this section of the epic, there follows the anudyuta, the follow up game, in which Duryodhana, with his father's consent decides to stake Hastinapur against Indraprastha. It is the final moment of truth: this time not the slow attrition of possessions but an instant play of identity. Yudhishtira cannot refuse, for he is under the ritual obligation. But the authors keep the story going. The play is not quite an all or nothing play, but close enough

This section, as you can see, is much shorter than 'The Dicing'. Whereas the earlier section is a vital one in the plot of the story this one gives us a number of clues to the direction the story will take. Also, it is a peculiar combination of psychological traits, human behaviour and weaknesses and a great deal of philosophising about life and human wrong doing. There are passages which contain expositions of Hindu ritual and the vows and prophecies of the Pandavas and Draupadi give us clues about the future. Vidura, endowed with *divyadrishti* foretells a gloomy future and Dhirtrashtra is torn between paternal love and fair play.

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Draupadi having used two of the three boons given to her by Dhritrashtra has been able to free her husbands and they return to their kingdom with all their wealth and freedom. Duryodhan however paints a horrific picture in words for the blind Dhritrashtra and makes him believe that the Pandavas will return to avenge the indignities and humiliation to which they were subjected in the Assembly. The might of Bhima and Arjuna would wipe out the whole Kuru clan and the only way to pre-empt that is to call them back for a final decisive game of dice where the stake would be a twelve-year exile to the forest for the loser and another year living incognito. If discovered, they would have to face another twelve years in exile. This is a plot that has been carefully planned with the help of Sakuni and Karna.

Two reasons become instrumental in Dhritrashtra giving his consent for a sequel to dicing. It is said that on the one hand he gets convinced by Duryodhan that the Pandavas would certainly attack the Kauravas to avenge their humiliation and would thus kill them all. On the other hand, it is also said that it is Dhritrashtra's blind love for his son that makes him give his consent for a second game of dice. He goes against the advice of all his kinsmen. The belief in destiny too plays a part here for he tells Gandhari that if the line of Kauravas is to end, he cannot avert it:

> "The king, thus addressed by Gandhari who pointed out to him in such language the path of virtue, replied unto her, saying,--'If the destruction of our race is come, let it take place freely. I am ill able to prevent it. Let it be as they (these my sons) desire. Let the Pandavas return. And let my sons again gamble with the sons of Pandu." (*Sabha Parva*, Book II Section LXXIV).

Gandhari however warns Dhritrashtra against believing his wicked son and to follow the law. Her behaviour is more reasonable and is neither fatalistic nor clouded by blind love for her son. Gandhari like other women in the epic (Kunti, Draupadi) is the one sane voice who knows her son Duryodhana very well and is apprehensive because of the terrible portents that had accompanied his birth. Dhritrashtra's frequent references to destiny however, add to the fatalistic perspective which surfaces from time to time in the epic. Even the mighty Drona with whom the entire Kaurava clan seek refuge, seems like a victim of his own destiny condemned to die at the hands of Drupada, a king whom he had deprived of his kingship.

Duryodhan's plan is to stop the Pandavas before they reach their kingdom. Dhritrashtra sends word to Yudhishthira to call them back for a second decisive game of dice. Yudhishthira's acceptance is based on two things. The fact that he follows the path of law and dharma and knows that he cannot disobey the king makes him accept the proposal even though he is acutely aware of the fact that he would be staking everything on it once again and might lose

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it all. The second view that emerges from the text is that he thinks that whatever is to happen will happen and he takes it to be the will of God. The Pandavas resign to their fate. Thus, the stage is set for a second game of dice – the sequel to dicing.

1.4.2 The Second Game of Dice

The Pandavas return to the assembly hall. The stake is victory against twelve-year exile in the forest followed by one year of living in the open without being discovered. The game begins and Yudhishthira loses to Sakuni. The Kauravas win with their deceit and trickery. The Pandavas once again lose their wealth, their kingdom and also their comfort. They have to now dress up in deer skin and set off to live a life of exile for twelve years in the forest. They seem to be crushed by a sense of destiny being thus played out. Dushasana's insulting comments on the Pandavas and his demeaning offer to Draupadi to leave the destitute Pandavas and come over and choose a husband from amongst the rich Kurus is enough to rile the agitated Bhima. He warns Dushasana and pledges to drink his blood in war.

> "As thou piercest our hearts hear with these thy arrowy words, so shall I pierce thy heart in battle, recalling all this to thy mind. And they also who from anger or covetousness are walking behind thee as thy protectors, --them also shall I send to the abode of Yama with their descendants and relatives." (Book 2: *Sabha Parva*: Section LXXVI)

The Pandavas accept the verdict and prepare to depart for the forest. They have followed the path of dharma and have submitted to the rule of law. But the anger seething in each of their hearts is palpable and finds manifestation in the manner of their departure. When Dhritrashtra asks Vidur to describe for him the manner in which each of the Pandavas left Vidur speaks thus:

> "Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, hath gone away covering his face with his cloth. And Bhima, O king, hath gone away looking at his own mighty arms. And Jishnu (Arjuna) hath gone away, following the king spreading sand-grains around. And Sahadeva, the son of Madri, hath gone away besmearing his face, and Nakula, the handsomest of men, O king, hath gone away, staining himself with dust and his heart in great affliction. And the large-eyed and beautiful Krishna hath gone away, covering her face with her dishevelled hair following in the wake of the king, weeping and in tears. And O monarch, Dhaumya goeth along the road, with kusa grass in hand, and uttering the aweful mantras of Sama Veda that relate to Yama." (*The Mahabharata*, Book 2: *Sabha Parva*: Section LXXIX).

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On being asked, Vidur gives the reasons behind the behaviour of each one of the Pandavas as they leave. Beginning with Yudhishthira he says that after being deprived of his kingdom by dishonest means he goes with closed eyes to save people from his anger. Bhim flexes his mighty arms desiring to use their strength against their enemy. The grains that Arjun scatters as he follows in the footsteps of Yudhishthira are signify the arrows he would rain on his enemiesin the battle. Sahdev doesn't wish to be recognized in his day of trouble and Nakul smears his face with dust lest the ladies looking at him lose their hearts to him.

Vidur's description of Draupadi is heartrending and at the same time instills fear in the onlookers. Vidur describes her thus:

> "And Draupadi goeth, attired in one piece of stained cloth, her hair dishevelled, and weeping, signifying--'The wives of those for whom I have been reduced to such a plight, shall on the fourteenth year hence be deprived of husbands, sons and relatives and dear ones and smeared all over with blood, with hair dishevelled and all in their feminine seasons enter Hastinapore having offered oblations of water (unto the manes of those they will have lost)." ." (Book 2: *Sabha Parva*: Section LXXIX)

He next spaeaks of Daumya, the Panadava priest who in a terrifying manner with kusa grass in his hand,goes chanting the mantras of *Sama Veda* that relate to Yama the God of death. His manner, says Vidur, signifies that when the battle wll be over the priests of the kauravs will chant these mantras for their dead.

As the Pandavas leave all signs indicate that a disastrous war is imminent now!

1.4.3 Check Your Progress

1. Why does Duryodhan want to call the Pandavas back for a second game of dice?
2. What are the reasons for Dhritrashtra giving his consent?
3. Why does Gandhari oppose it?
4. Why does Yudhishthir accept the challenge?
5. What role does destiny play here?
6. In the 'Sequel to Dicing' what kind of future does Vidur foretell?

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1.5 THE GAME OF DICE IN RELATION TO THE PLOT

The question that often comes to mind is, "Why does the game of dice have such a crucial significance in the *Mahabharata*?" After all, anywhere, anyone who knows the least bit about the *Mahabharata* also knows about the game of dice, about Yudhishthira, Duryodhana, Shakuni and the loss of the Kingdom, the brothers, and the beloved wife Draupadi. Everyone also knows that Shakuni was a trickster, Duryodhana a greedy cruel prince, Dhritarashtra, a partisan guardian, Bhishma an impotent head of a disintegrating clan.

Let us look at the various reasons which render this episode to crucial. The first thing to note is the absence of Krishna during the game of dice. Krishna has been a visible and significant presence during the Rajasuya yagya and has been the guest of honour. He has been present in the earlier part of the book of the assembly hall but is absent during the climax, the game of dice. His absence is explained by his required presence to settle important war business with Sambha who had assaulted Dvaraka. This whole sequence of Krishna's presence and absence can be seen as the work of poet contributors who wished to glorify and deify him. After all the historical Krishna was just a chieftain, brother of Balram, and lord of Dwarka. The religious deity can be seen here in the process of evolution. When Krishna is absent things go horribly wrong and even the desperate calling out to him prevents, somewhat, Draupadi's shame." The Rajasuya of Yudhishthira has been made an occasion to glorify Krishna. He is not quite the God yet — at least not by *Bhagavad-Gita* standards—but his incipient godhead already requires his absence from situations that he cannot dominate." (van Buitenen). Had he attended the dicing no doubt he would have interfered on behalf of the Pandavas, which would have meant the end of the game, and thus, in effect, the end of the *Mahabharata*.

To examine this question, we have to remind ourselves that the epic is an *itihas purana*— a work of art—a poetic composition. However, the poetic skills of the composer/composers are so highly developed that we have before us a very dramatic climax. It is like the climactic scene or episode of a play. The plot hinges upon this scene. The tragic action is precipitated henceforth. All the major characters are exposed for what they are. Their dialogues are revelatory. Whatever hypocrisy might have lain dormant in the self-righteous Bhishma or Dhritarashtra is revealed, as is their impotence in the face of a rash and impatient Duryodhana. So, while on the one hand this scene exposes the male characters, on the other hand it makes us acutely aware of the limitations of women, even royal women like Draupadi.

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It is also a scene which brings together Draupadi & Krishna conveying a double lesson, as subsequent myths of sati Draupadi indicate. Draupadi is depicted and worshipped in later cults as the model of the intelligent and loyal wife. Her chastity (satitva) has the power to prevent her shame. On the other hand, it enables the performance of a miracle by Krishna, the endless lengthening of her sari as Duryodhana tries to strip her in the Sabha. This episode actually provides drama, thrill, villainy, excitement, which are very obvious to us because of the advantage of media exposure which we have unlike earlier readers of the epic.

So far, we have seen the tangible ways in which the Dicing is crucial to the rest of the *Mahabharata*. There is yet another vital point to note on the matter. That relates to the philosophy and the religious dimension of the epic.

If there had been no game of Dice, there would have been no humiliation of the Pandavas and molestation of Draupadi. Had these not taken place, the provocation for all the vows of bringing destruction upon the Kauravas and their allies would have been lost. Draupadi's violent curses and Bhima's vows of revenge are rooted in this episode. Within the larger context of the epic there is a large number of characters who have to fulfil their destiny and it is the *Mahabharata* war, which will provide the opportunity. The Shikandi—Bhishma struggle, Drona's death and various other scores are settled in the war resulting from the Kauravas' refusal to hand over legitimate power and property to the Pandavas.

It is in the war whose seeds were sown at the game of Dice that the most profound religious discourse of all time was recited. The *Bhagavadgita*, the ultimate treatise on man's conduct in life, was actually a counselling lecture to Arjun by Lord Krishna when Arjun is reduced to inaction at the prospect of fighting his own brethren. I am sure you do not miss the religious stature of the Krishna who began as a political manipulator and chieftain in the early books of the epic.

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1.5.1 Check Your Progress

1. Why is Krishna absent in the game of dice?
2. How does the episode help build Krishna's stature as a god?
3. Why is the game of dice structurally important to the *Mahabharat*?
4. Can we say that without the game of dice the *Mahabharat* would not have been possible?
5. What light does the episode throw on the male characters in the epic and on the position of women in those times?

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1.6 SUMMING UP

'The Dicing' and the ''Sequel to the Dicing are two crucial episodes in the epic on which the entire narrative hinges. In these two episodes we see how the conniving and scheming Duryodhan along wth Shakuni, Karna and the Kauravas not only defeats Yudhisththir in a game of dice but reduces the Pandavas to the level of slaves and leaves them penniless. Draupadi's humiliation is the last straw and her two pertinent questions force the Assembly to think. Dhritrashtra then grants her three boons two of which she uses to get back the Pandavas their freedom and their wealth and kingdom. Duryodhan however, plans a sequel and true to his dharma Yudhishthir cannot refuse the challenge. A second game of dice follows which is again lost by the Pandavas and they are sent on a twelve year exile to the forest with the condition of living the thirteenth year incognito.

In these two episodes we observe the virtue and righteousness of the Pandavas and the deviousness of the Kauravas. We also witness the helplessness of people like Gandhari and Bhishm who fail to counsel Duryodhan and see how destiny plays its part when Duryodhan is able to convince Dhritrashtra to give his consent for a second decisive game of dice.

From the point of view of the whole epic, the episode picks up threads from the books of the earlier part, but more significantly it prepares the reader for the action of the subsequent books. It provides a catalyst for the resolution to all the conflicts referred to in the earlier parts of the epic. In the process it reverberates in a transgenerational framework. This means that the action affects and is brought about, by more than two generations. The most obvious character whose life spans a long period of time is Bhishma who has seen Satyawati, Vichitravirya, Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and his descendants. In fact, the events of the game of dice cast their shadow on the characters right up to the gates of heaven i.e., their death.

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Unit-I(b)

General Introduction to *The Mahabharata*

The Epic Conventions and Indian Epic Poetry in Sanskrit

An epic is defined as a long narrative poem depicting heroic deeds of great characters, usually showcasing their great gallantry and bravery on a grand scale. An epic is broadly classified under the genre of poetry as one of the major forms of narrative literature. It comprises of both oral and written work. The word epic is derived from the Greek adjective *epikos* which translates to poetic story. The epic poems grew out of heroic poetry which was about characters from history or legend. The epic genre deals with subjects such as myths, histories, superhuman capabilities, glorifying legends, histories, religious tales, philosophical and moral ideas. It is a means to pass on traditional values, heritage and culture from one generation to another without the need to write. An epic usually celebrates the life and actions of national heroes who showed exemplary courage and conviction with a sense of moral duty. The primary function of epic poetry is to celebrate the exploits, victories of illustrious ancestors, trace and respect the lineage to which one belongs, to provide role models, and to pass on the rich heritage and historical knowledge to the forthcoming generation. An epic is the oldest popular genre which reflects into the national ideals, value system and sociohistorical domain. It is known for the projection of deities who are seen to intervene in human life and for its use of exalted language to add the element of awe.

Aristotle ranked this genre as second only to tragedy though many Renaissance critics place the position of epic at the top of all other genres. Most of the famous epics contain a ceremonial narrative style pertaining to a grand subject. The Greek epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, written by Homer, narrate the story of the Trojan War and the accomplishments of Ulysses, Achilles and other heroes of the Greek world while Virgil's *Aeneid* presents the Roman history in Latin. The great epic of Dante called *Divine Comedy* captures the ascent of the soul from hell to heaven through the painful experience of purgatory. Milton's greatest work the *Paradise Lost* deals with the reworking of the biblical stories and focuses on the subject of Man's first disobedience.

The Indian epic poetry is popularly known as *Mahakavya*. The epic poems that mark the beginning of this tradition in India comprises of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which were originally composed in Sanskrit. They form a part of the canon of Hindu scriptures. The idealization of the hero and placing him on a pedestal is central to these writings. They establish the values of human civilization and highlight moral teachings such as the importance of truth and self-sacrifice. They were performed orally before transforming the

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words into written form in Sanskrit and later translating it in several other languages. Along with the above, The Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature and Sangam Literature helped lay the cultural foundation of India. These are some of the oldest surviving epic poems.

An Indian epic is also called *Itihasa* in Sanskrit as it portrays events of the past centuries. The greatness of the Indian epic cannot be understood without learning about the Epic Period, its political environment, functioning of the royal palace and its association with arts and literature. The initial glimpses of epic poetry in India can be seen in Vedic Sanskrit literature particularly in the hymns of the Rig Veda. The recital of poetry was an integral part of religious events at festivals. The themes generally revolved around the stories of gods and heroes. The narrators, authors and preservers of this form of ancient poetry were the bards who lived at the king's court and recited these compositions during feasts. Indian epic poetry finds its roots in the circle of such bards or poets. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are a collection of variety of poems which existed throughout centuries and have undergone additions, alterations, and revisions.

The following are the epic conventions which define broad characteristics common to this genre:

a) Invocation to the muse at the start of an epic. In the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa invokes Nara and Narayana, avatars of Lord Vishnu, and Goddess Saraswati.

b) Epic begins in *'media res'* that is, in the middle of action. The *Mahabharata* follows this technique.

c) The hero of the epic has supernatural attributes overshadowing the characteristics of common people. The action displays the courage, bravery, moral duties of the hero. The heroic traits are put through a trial by the circumstances surrounding him. The *Mahabharata* has many central heroes like Krishna, Bhishma, Arjuna, Karna among others.

d) Formal speeches by main characters. Book V of the *Mahabharata* has speeches by its central characters like Krishna and Karna.

e) The epic style follows a grand narrative with vast setting and broad dimensions where the actions of characters can be applied in a universal context.

f) Supernatural intervention – In the *Mahabharata*, Krishna is said to be the avatar of Lord Vishnu. Also, in Book V the birth of Karna has supernatural elements.

g) Use of epic simile and repetition of stock phrases because epic poetry was passed on orally and this aspect helped in remembering the important lessons. In the *Mahabharata* too, lots of events and speeches are repeated.

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The *Mahabharata* is considered as the longest epic poem. Sage Ved Vyas is credited with the authorship of this extensive work. The oldest surviving parts of the text is about 400 BCE. It deals with the struggle for power between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas in Greater India. It contains more than 1,00,000 slokas (couplets) in 18 (Parvas) sections.

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B.A. (Hons.) English /B.A. (Programme)

THE TEMPTATION OF KARNA

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STRUCTURE

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Mahabharata* is characterised as a work of art that would sustain socio-cultural heritage and traditions of learning. It is often called as *itihasa* which is as endless as the Vedas. While being both prescriptive and descriptive, it presents the past, present and future. It engages with culture, history, philosophy together with cosmology and portrays it with grandiose on a large scale. The *Mahabharata* is also categorized as a *kavya* or poem but not of an ordinary level rather at par with the Vedas. It is also conferred the status of being called as the fifth Veda. The text is envisioned as two trees, the tree of *manyu* or wrath and the tree of *dharma* or ethics.

This lesson discusses sections from Book V titled "The Temptation of Karna" which unfolds the truth behind the birth of Karna who is caught in a moral conflict between his obligation to his good friend Duryodhana and his duty towards his birth mother Kunti who appeals to Karna.

Karna plays a central role in the epic the *Mahabharata*. He is the son of Kunti and Surya, the sun god. Kunti received a mantra from sage Durvasa as a reward for taking good care of him. It would enable her to invoke a deity of her choice and have a son with him. She wanted to test the mantra and conjured the god of sun with whom she has her first son Karna. However, Kunti was a maiden at the time of his birth and she had to abandon him in order to preserve the reputation of her father. The name Karna is a Sanskrit word meaning the ear. It is said that Karna was born out of Kunti's ear. He was born adorned with splendid earrings and a majestic armour which signifies power. They are for his protection and are symbolic of his immorality. His demeanour at the time of his birth is said to be glorious and divine. After he was abandoned by Kunti in the Ganges river, he was found by a charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha who take him to be their son and name him Vasusena.

Karna grows up to be a successful warrior, he possesses a gift of gab and is a loyal friend to Duryodhana. Karna's mastery in martial abilities was known to Duryodhana and he knew that only Karna can match the skill and military prowess of Arjuna but since Karna was from a lower caste it was against the moral codes to challenge a kshatriya. Duryodhana thus appoints Karna as a king of Anga so he can go against Arjuna and prove his valour.

Karna is truthful in his words and generous in his actions. Despite being forewarned by his father Surya, Karna sacrifices his earrings and breast plate to Indra who was disguised as

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a brahmin. Karna was then no longer invincible, yet his action was of heroic disposition. He is an upholder of integrity, principles, moral and ethical norms.

Until Book V he is oblivious about his kshatriya birth. In Book V, Krishna and Kunti try to persuade Karna to join the Pandavas in the war of Kurukshetra. Krishna visits him first and tempts him by offering several benefits which he could gain by joining the Pandavas, to which Karna refuses, for he has different perspective on this issue. He follows his Dharma by being loyal to his friend Duryodhana who gave him protection and position when he was being insulted. When Kunti confesses to Karna that she is his mother and Surya god confirms the words of Kunti, he tells her about the hardships and struggles he faced to reach here. He understands that she has come because of her love for the Pandavas so out of respect he makes a promise to spare all her sons except for Arjuna. In the event of the death of either him or Arjuna, the number of her sons will remain five. Despite being faced with such difficult choice his faith did not falter. The temptation of power and piles of gold did not distract him from his duties and moral obligations. He showed confidence in his decision to be faithful towards those who supported him in his struggles.

1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the course of your reading, you will be able to:

1. Learn about the advice of Krishna to Karna
2. Know about the temptation of Karna and how he deals with it
3. Study the moral dilemmas faced by Karna
4. Find out the truth about Karna's birth and identity from the confession of Kunti

1.3 SYNOPSIS

The segment deals with the attempt of Krishna and Kunti to convince Karna not to participate in the battle. Karna finds out that Kunti is his biological mother. Krishna is an envoy of peace and aims to prevent the war. He warns Karna that the defeat of the Kauravas is preordained and the destruction of the world after the battle is inevitable. Krishna advises Karna to join the Pandavas as they are his brothers and accept the offer of kingship since he is the eldest son of Pandu and thereby the rightful heir to the Pandava dynasty. The confession of Kunti reveals the truth about the birth of Karna. She attempts to persuade Karna to forsake Duryodhana and unite with the Pandavas. However, Karna is not tempted by the offer of

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obtaining a royal status and series of material pleasures that will be granted to him on joining the lineage of the Pandavas. He refuses to betray his well-wishers and vows to honour his commitment towards his friend, Duryodhana and his foster parents, Adhiratha, and Radha.

1.4 DETAILED SUMMARY

1.4.1 Part I: The Advice of Krishna

1.4.1.1 Section CXL

The section begins with Dhritarashtra asking Sanjaya why Krishna has invited Karna to his chariot. Dhritarashtra is keen to find out what Krishna tells Karna. Sanjaya repeats the words of Krishna for Dhritarashtra. There are certain facts surrounding the birth of Karna that are ambiguous in nature. Krishna reveals that Karna is not a *suta* son. Karna was born to Kunti when she was a maiden. Krishna tells Karna that in the scriptures it is stated that a son born to a woman prior to her marriage is counted as the son of the wedded husband just like the other sons born out of a wedlock. So, Karna is in fact the oldest born son of Pandu and the Pandavas are his brothers. Since Karna is the eldest son, he is the rightful heir to the Pandavas. Krishna attempts to convince Karna to turn his back on Duryodhana and to unite with the Pandavas. Krishna further paints a picture to lure Karna into submitting to his plan. Karna is told about the respect and warm regards he will receive from his five Pandava brothers and his kinsmen, the elaborate rituals that would take place to welcome him and is also reminded by Krishna that in the course of joining the Pandavas he will have Draupadi as his wife. Krishna advises Karna to rejoice and be a part of the celebratory ceremonies that behold him which will be observed to welcome him to the throne. Krishna gives a vivid description of the admiration Karna will receive and the festivities which would commence to honour him if he decides to take the offer of kingship.

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1.4.1.2 Check Your Progress

1. What does Krishna say to Karna?
2. How did Krishna try to tempt Karna?
3. What was Krishna's motive behind tempting Karna?

1.4.1.1 Section CXLI

Karna holds Krishna's words and advice in high esteem. He expresses his gratitude to Krishna for showing concern. Karna understands that the suggestions of Krishna are in his

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interest and welfare for which he is thankful. However, he politely refuses to accept the offer and he provides broadly two reasons for his decision. First, he voices his agony at the very thought of being abandoned at the command of Surya by his birth mother Kunti. In accordance with the scriptures, morally he is the son of Pandu but has been raised by charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha. They took him in as their son, performed all the necessary birth rites as a *suta* and raised him amidst immense love and abundance of affection. He has performed all his domestic and marital rites with *sutas*. Karna feels morally obligated to Adhiratha and Radha for the hardships they have endured to raise him. He was named Vasusena by his father Adhiratha. Karna married according to their will and is blessed with sons due to the selfless deeds of his parents for him. He cannot imagine breaking the bond with his parents neither in exchange for heaps of gold nor for the sake of the whole world. Secondly, he expresses his sense of moral duty towards his friend Duryodhana because of whom Karna enjoyed fifteen years of royal power without any trouble. Karna is indebted to Duryodhana for helping him gain a social status. Duryodhana is responsible for the position of Karna and has always shown confidence and belief in Karna. He is relying on Karna for his victory and Karna cannot let him down. He refuses to be a traitor and cheat his own sympathisers. Duryodhana has challenged the Pandavas to a battle and Karna has invited Arjuna to face him in a single combat. It is his duty to stand by Duryodhana in his hour of need. Karna says that even if he gets the empire, he will pass it on to Duryodhana. He requests Krishna not to disclose this secret to the Pandavas otherwise Yudhishthira will refuse the throne because the truth will stand between him and his *dharma*. Karna sees Yudhishthira as possessing the proper traits and qualities needed to be a ruler. Yudhishthira also has the support of his earnest and sincere kinsmen. Karna can foresee that the mighty kingdom will be won by Yudhishthira. He knows the victory of the Pandavas is predestined and the sacrifice of the Kauravas is inevitable. Karna repents his insulting behaviour and the use of harsh words towards the Pandavas for the appeasement of Duryodhana. He can envision that the Kauravas will pay a hefty price which will begin with Arjuna slaying Karna in the duel and end with the sacrifice of Duryodhana at the hands of Bhimasena. Karna prays to Krishna not to let the kshatriyas die a useless death in misery and awful conditions. He appeals to Krishna to let Kshatriyas face their death by weaponry in the most sacred place among the three worlds, the land of Kurukshetra, so that they all can attain heaven. Their courage and bravery shall be celebrated and passed on by the holy brahmins who will keep the glory of the kshatriya alive as they will continue to recite the great battle of the Bharatas till there exists mountains and rivers.

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1.4.1.2 Check Your Progress

1. Why does Karna refuse the offer of Krishna despite knowing the ill fate of the Kauravas?
2. Why does Karna feel morally obligated towards his parents, Adhiratha and Radha and his friend, Duryodhana?
3. Why does Karna request Krishna not to disclose the secret of his birth to the Pandavas?

1.4.1.1 Section CXLII

Krishna asks Karna if the offer of kingship and ruling the entire world not tempt him. He reassures Karna that the victory of the Pandavas is certain. He provides gory and vivid details from the battlefield in which the Kurus being slayed at the hands of the Pandavas. This triumph of the Pandavas will mark the beginning of Kali age. Karna is told to deliver the message to Drona, Santanu's son and Kripa that the war will commence in seven days on the Day of Indra and all those who follow the command of Duryodhana will succeed in finding their own death.

1.4.1.1 Section CXLIII

Karna questions the omniscient Krishna that since he already knows everything, why did he seek to beguile and tempt him. The destruction of the whole world at the hands of Sakuni, Dussasana, Duryodhana and Karna himself is predetermined. He explains the astronomical events and astrological happening that reinforce the impending doom. Karna furthers elaborate the disturbing omens, fearsome dreams, abominable visions that are a premonition of the imminent annihilation that awaits the world. He has observed that all positive and favourable omens support the Pandavas which are an indication of their victory. Karna bids farewell to Krishna and returns with Sanjaya.

1.4.1.2 Check Your Progress

1. What were the omens and visions which foretell the victory of the Pandavas and the defeat of the Karauravs?

1.4.1.3 Analysis of Part I

Krishna approaches Karna as an ambassador of peace, seeking to prevent the impending war and violence. He knows that the battleground marks their doom and will turn into a deathbed of the warriors. He approaches Karna to tell him about his high birth and disclose that Kunti

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is his mother so that he will join the Pandavas. Krishna tempts him to join his own family of Pandavas and lures him with all kinds of riches, wealth, respect and honour. Krishna wants to captivate the thoughts and senses of Karna so that he would give in to the temptation and the world may witness the great reunion of Karna with his mother Kunti. Krishna, at his end, puts in efforts to stop the war from happening. He was impressed with Karna's knowledge of Vedas and scriptures.

Karna makes a virtuous decision of declining the proposal. He raises pertinent issues before Krishna. One, Karna realizes that death and destruction of the Kurus is preordained but he cannot abandon his ethical and moral duty towards his parents, Adhiratha and Radha and his best friend, Duryodhana. Two, he makes an insightful request to Krishna to keep this conversation a secret and the truth about his identity should not reach the Pandavas otherwise Yudhishthira will refuse to accept the throne. Three, he further appeals to Krishna that Kshatriya should have a respectable death and find heaven. This thoughtful response of Karna and his intuitive pleas shows his noble side. He had to decide between the two alternatives of either adhering to the suggestion of Krishna to join the Pandavas which may have led Duryodhana and therewith the Kauravas to withdraw from the war, or to abide by his moral duties and ethical codes dictated by his conscience, belief and principle to support Duryodhana. This is one of the dilemmas faced by Karna.

1.4.1.4 Check Your Progress

1. What were the reasons behind the temptation of Karna and why does Karna refuse the proposal of Krishna?

1.4.2 Part II: The Confession of Kunti

1.4.2.1 Section CXLIV

This section begins with the narrator who delineates the conversation between Kshatri (Vidura) and Kunti in which Kshatri expresses his helplessness and misery at the failure to evade the battle. Even the efforts Krishna did not discourage the Kurus. He talks about his incompetence at persuading Duryodhana against the thought of the war. Yudhishthira, despite being a man of great strength, appears weak in his judgement of fighting the battle. King Dhritarashtra fails to comprehend the motivation that drives his son to the battlefield. He takes immense pride in his sons which has deprived him of judgement. He chooses to tread an unscrupulous path to his destruction.

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Kunti is grief stricken at hearing the words of Vidura and thinks about the absurdity of fighting over wealth which is going to result in mass slaughter of their own family and kinsmen. But her heart seems to be divided as she also believes that the Pandavas have no option but to participate in the battle. She is constantly thinking about the repercussions of the war. On one hand, she feels that if they refuse to fight, they will end up in poverty and face disgrace which is worse than death itself. On the other hand, she believes that there is no victory in killing one's own kinsmen either. She is mostly afraid of the power and might of Drona, Bhishma and Karna. She is hopeful that Drona may not attack his own pupils and grandfather Bhishma may favour the Pandavas but the biggest threat to them is Karna who abhors the Pandavas and his heart is filled with hatred for Arjuna. She decides to share her secret with Karna and to reveal that she gave birth to him. She recalls the days when she was devoted to the service of the holy sage Durvasa who was pleased with Kunti and taught her a mantra that would enable her to have sons from any god that she wished to invoke. Unfortunately, Kunti did not fully understand the power and future implications of the boon. She was overwhelmed with curiosity to test the mantra and summoned the sun god, Surya. The mantra was potent, and she conceived Karna. Remembering her past, she reaches the shore of river Ganges to find her son Karna chanting Vedic hymns and praying before the sun god. Kunti was certain that her son Karna will not disobey her words.

1.4.2.2 Check Your Progress

1. Why was Kunti feeling restless and worried for her sons?
2. What was the inner turmoil taking place within Kunti?
3. When does Kunti decide to tell Karna that she is his biological mother? What were the intentions behinds Kunti's big revelation?

1.4.2.1 Section CXLV

Karna respectfully greets Kunti, introduces himself as the son of Adhiratha and Radha, and asks what service he could do for her. Kunti reveals her big secret to Karna and tries to explain her predicament. She tells Karna of his majestic birth as he was born with radiant earrings and a breast plate. Karna is advised to unite with his brothers and enjoy the glory that would follow. Kunti reminds him of his duty as her son. She wants the Kauravas to witness to union of Karna and Arjuna. She knows that together they can accomplish the world.

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1.4.2.1 Section CXLVI

Karna hears the voice of his real father Surya who validates the words of Kunti. He advises Karna to follow the path that his mother shows and assures Karna that it will lead to his prosperity. Karna disapproves the commands of the kshatriya law as he has been deprived of the rites of a kshatriya. He is filled with contempt at Kunti's negligence when she abandoned him for her own interest and ignored the wellbeing of her child. He could have lost his life. He questions the actions of Kunti and asks her why she has reached out for him on the eve of the battle. He can see that she has her own vested motive behind telling Karna about his birth. Karna asks if going against his words at the eleventh hour will not be a violation of the kshatriya *dharma*. He says he will be regarded as a coward for dishonouring his promise and betraying the Kurus. Duryodhana has always respected him and has been attentive to his needs. He has been a dutiful friend who has obliged Karna in many ways. Karna cannot think of abandoning them in their hour of need. Karna is indebted to him and it would be against his own principles to go against someone who stood by him during his worst times. Karna however takes a pledge before Kunti that he will fight only Arjuna and not harm any of her other sons. Under any circumstance, either him or Arjuna will survive along with the rest of her four sons. Thus, the number of her sons would continue to remain five.

1.4.2.2 Check Your Progress

1. How did Karna respond to Kunti's confession?
2. What reasons did Karna cite for his refusal of Kunti's offer?
3. How did Karna show respect and prove his regard for Kunti?

1.4.2.3 Analysis of Part II

Kunti was worried contemplating the outcome of the war of the Kurukshetra. She was mostly afraid of the gnawing hatred of Karna towards the Pandavas especially Arjuna. By revealing to Karna the truth about his parentage, Kunti wanted to secure the lives of her sons. She was confident that Karna will not disappoint her and will join his brothers in the battle. Her intentions though questioned by Karna are not entirely wrong. As a mother she wanted do to the best for the protection of her sons. At the same time, the refusal of Karna to accept her proposal was conscious and self-righteous decision of Karna. He had to decide between his duty towards his birth parents and his moral obligations towards his friend, Duryodhana. The decision to choose one duty over another can be a challenging and Karna was bound by his

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ethical codes. His regard for Kunti's sentiments is seen when he promises not to kill any of her sons in the battle except for Arjuna.

1.4.2.4 Check Your Progress

1. What did Kunti confess before Karna? Why did she decide to tell Karna the secret of his birth on the eve of the battle?
2. What were the duties that held back Karna from accepting Kunti's offer?

1.5 THEMES

1.5.1 The Question of *Dharma* and Morality

Dharma is a complex notion in Indian philosophy, religion and spirituality. It's a doctrine with multiple layers which teaches to uphold the moral duties and ethical principles and practice virtue, righteousness and good behaviour to preserve the order of the universe. It also instructs to abide by cosmic laws and to act in accordance with the belief system stated in scriptures. This will guide one to follow the path of the duties and actions as defined by one's birth. Karna places more importance on his loyalty to Duryodhana as compared to the recommendation of Krishna to switch sides to join the Pandavas and become the king in accordance to *Dharma-sastra*, the sacred book of Hindus in Sanskrit pertaining to dharma, religious and legal duty.

There are primarily three dilemmas which are faced by Karna. Firstly, the moral conflict within Karna whether to join his brothers and reunite with the Pandavas or to show allegiance to Duryodhana who has supported Karna in his trials and tribulations. Secondly, Karna is a dutiful son and is seen to be torn between his obligation and responsibility towards his foster parents, Adhiratha and Radha, and his birth parents, the sun god and Kunti. Thirdly, there exists a latent conundrum in the mind of Karna if he should adhere to the ethical duties and principles of kshatriya *dharma* or fulfil the expectation of *Suta varna*. Each dilemma reveals a different side of the character who is faced with complex choices. It is difficult to arrive at one right decision because both the choices are right in their own premises, and it is almost like holding one duty as more important against the other. Karna is thus faced with a complex challenge which is not to decide right from wrong but to choose one duty over another.

1.5.2 The Subject of Caste

Karna is resentful of the discrimination he faces for being a son of a charioteer. He wanted to acquire the art of warfare from Drona who refused Karna due to his caste. He disguised

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himself as a brahmin to become a student of Parashurama. He was stopped from participating in Draupadi's Swayamvar due to his caste. His *suta* status came in the way of showcasing his martial skills. According to the scriptures, a *suta* due to his lower caste was not allowed to fight a kshatriya. When Karna challenged Arjuna, instead of accepting it he insulted Karna by calling him a *suta*. Duryodhana saw in Karna the potential equal to that of Arjuna. He found Karna to be someone to befriend in order to balance out the power of combatant Arjuna. Karna is made the king of Anga by Duryodhana so he can challenge Arjuna. Karna proved to be a better archer than Arjuna. Karna in his hatred vowed to defeat and kill Arjuna. In Book V, Kunti confesses to Karna that she is his birth mother and asks him to follow his Kshatriya duty of protecting his brothers and appeals to Karna to side with the Pandavas in the war. This stirs more bitterness in Karna as he realizes that he was denied his inherent status of a kshatriya. He discerns that the reason behind the invocation of the kshatriya code by Krishna and his mother Kunti is the prevention of the war of Kurukshetra and protection of the Pandavas respectively. Despite his hatred for the Pandavas, he shows reverence to Kunti and promises not to harm any of her sons except for Arjuna. This way in the event of his or Arjuna's death, the number of her sons will always remain five.

1.5.3 Identity Crisis in Karna

Karna was born as a Kshatriya in a ruling class family but in no time, he was transformed in a lower caste. The caste is linked to the social identity of an individual. Karna is insulted and considered a social outcaste because of his alternate identity. This crisis of identity made him feel ill-fated and segregated. He doesn't give up and continues to fight in order to establish his place in the society, but his hopes are crushed repeatedly. He was intrigued by the earrings and the armour with which he was born. Family, kin, caste, class are closely connected to formulation of an identity. However, Karna had no support of any of the above elements to strengthen his position. It was Duryodhana who made Karna a kshatriya by merit if not birth and for this gesture Karna was eternally grateful to him. Despite receiving the royal title from Duryodhana, Karna was still seen as a misfit. Even though he learnt about his birth and was advised by Krishna to accept kingship to the Pandava dynasty, Karna chose *dharma*. He did not yield to the temptation of material wealth and held on to his principle and strong sense of ethics. He always knew that the defeat of the Kurus is destined yet he stood his ground which shows he is strong not just physically but mentally too. He could have shed the identity of a *suta* son and gained his worth in the world through proclaiming his royal descent and accepting his birth right to rule his kingdom. However, instead of being carried away, he embraced his own identity and thrived to prove his worth through his actions and not birth.

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1.5.4 Karna: The Tragic Hero

Karna is born with majestic demeanour, with gold earring and celestial armour. Despite all odds he was an accomplished warrior. Duryodhana sensed his martial abilities to be equivalent to Arjuna's. According to Julian Woods, Karna is a "tragic antihero" of the epic. He is both generous to the Brahmins yet arrogant and cruel to the Pandavas. Karna, like the other characters in the *Mahabharata*, exhibits a combination of both good and bad behaviour. The character of Karna provides an insight into human nature and its psyche. It is often his anger which is manifested in his speech for instance he made bitter comments towards the Pandavas and insulted Draupadi which he later regrets when he finds out that Pandavas are his half-brothers. Despite being born a Kshatriya he was not able to enjoy the status of a Kshatriya. He was brought up by a charioteer and his wife. He faced rejection from his own mother who abandoned him at birth. Despite being a great warrior and a distinguished archer, he was humiliated by the Pandavas and turned down by guru Dronacharya for being a *suta* son. He pretended to be a brahmin so that he can acquire martial skills from Parshurama. When Parshurama called his bluff and realized he is not a brahmin, he cursed Karna which cost him his life. The reason for his feelings of hatred and enmity is that life has been unfair to him. He is a victim of circumstances which bred discontentment within him. Yet he lived to be a noble man who followed the path of self-righteousness and practiced *dharma* and believed in *karma* (actions).

1.6 SUMMING UP

Karna values the contribution and sacrifices of his parents who raised him and gives them the credit for everything he has achieved. He is also grateful to Duryodhana for the respect and position he bestowed on him. Karna was honest to Krishna about his true motives when he says even if he is granted kingship, he will pass it on to Duryodhana. He proves his loyalty and friendship towards Duryodhana. When he finds out that the Pandavas are his brothers, he regrets using harsh words and repents his insulting behaviour towards his brothers and their wife Draupadi. He respects Kunti and shows reverence for her by taking the pledge. Karna is also seen fighting a difficult internal battle between his duties as a *suta* and as a kshatriya. He shows confidence in himself and his decisions which are self-righteous in nature. Karna's character reflects on the notion of *dharma* and discusses duty and code of ethics in his attempt to resolve his moral dilemmas.

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1.7 MODEL QUESTIONS (FROM PREVIOUS YEARS' PAPER)

Q1. Critically analyse the relationship between Karna and Kunti in *The Temptation of Karna*. (15)

Q.2 Analyse the ethical dilemma/s in the episode "Temptation of Karna". (15)

ANSWERS

A1. Refer to Part II: The Confession of Kunti, Summary and Analysis.

A2. Refer to the section on themes.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Suta	**:**	lower caste in Indian Caste or Varna System
Aristotle	**:**	Greek philosopher and thinker
Mahakavya	**:**	genre of Indian epic poetry in Sanskrit literature
Itihasa	**:**	meaning history stating the religious traditions and cultural heritage of the past generations.
Kurus	**:**	another term for the Kaurava clan

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Unit-I(c)

KRISHNA'S PEACE PROPOSAL

Udyog Parva – Book V – Section - LXXXIX-CXXXI

Bharat Choudhary

STRUCTURE

1.1 Introduction
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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Mahabharata* is an ancient Sanskrit poem describing the mythical Kurukshetra War between two sets of brothers descended from the King Bharata: the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The authorship of the *Mahābhārata* is attributed to Ved Vyasa. It is immensely popular in India and throughout Southeast Asia. It is considered so historically important to the Hindu tradition that it is sometimes referred to as the "fifth Veda." The four Vedas are the foundational texts of Hinduism, outlining tenets of the faith and doctrines for living, but none of them discuss the tenet of dharma. The work inspired many ancient works of art, such as Indian miniature paintings and the elaborate sculptures of the ancient temples of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thorn in Cambodia. Today *The Mahabharata* remains an important Hindu epic and continues to serve as the foundation for Hindu religious faith and mythology.

The text we are studying in this unit is an excerpt from *The Mahabharata* of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. This Unit deals with *Udyog Parva* (Book-5), Section – LXXXIX-CXXXI.

1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this Unit of the Study material you would:

- Be introduced to one of the most celebrated epic tale *Mahabharata* and its significance in Indian culture and Literature.
- Take an in depth look at a specific section of the epic dealing with the peace proposal of Krishna
- Analyse and learn about the human behaviour through the different characters in the story.
- Take a critical look at concepts of dharma and destiny in the context of the prescribed section from the *Mahabharata*.

1.3 SYNOPSIS

This segment deals with the instance when Krishna plays the role of a mediator between Pandavas and Kauravas to stop the great war which, if it occurs, will bring immense destruction in its wake. Except the Kauravas everyone wants to avoid the war, but Duryodhana is not ready to make peace with the Pandavas by giving them their share of the empire. Krishna comes to Hastinapur to present the Pandavas' case before everyone but

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Duryodhana is not ready to even accept his mistake. Many others like Dhritrashtra, Bhishma and Drona try to counsel Duryodhana but he disregards everyone and is adamant about not giving the Pandavas their share of the kingdom thus inviting the war.

1.4 DETAILED SUMMARY

1.4.1 Krishna's Arrival and His Peace Proposal (Sections LXXXIX – XCV)

Section LXXXIX (89)

Lord Krishna prepares to go to Hastinapur as a peace messenger from Pandavas' side and leaves Vrikasthala (province and town were situated in the southern part of Kuru Kingdom). In Hastinapur, everyone is participating in the preparation to welcome Krishna except Duryodhana (eldest Kaurava). All the citizens of Hastinapur come out of their houses to get a glimpse of lord Krishna. Upon arriving at the mansion, Krishna is welcomed by the King Dhritrashtra and everyone else. After the welcome ceremony and rituals, Krishna duly greets all the Kurus and then goes to the delightful abode of Vidura (the prime minister of the Kuru Kingdom and the paternal uncle of both the Pandavas and Kauravas) and updates him about the situation of the Pandavas.

Section XC (90)

Krishna next goes to meet his paternal Aunt Pritha (Queen Kunti, wife of Pandu and mother of Pandvas). With teary eyes and motherly concern in her heart, she inquires about the Pandavas and Draupadi. She still remembers the dishonour that her daughter-in-law had to go through. She asks about the wellbeing of her children one by one with great affection and worry. Pritha is aware of the possible war in future and what great destruction it can bring to the family as well as the empire. Krishna tries to console his aunt, assuring the wellness of the Pandavas and then bids farewell.

Section XCI (91)

Then, Krishna goes to meet Duryodhana in his grand palace where he finds the eldest Kaurava seated on his throne while several kings and all the Kurus are present in the court assembly. After the welcome rituals in the honour of Krishna, Duryodhana invites him to eat at his house which Krishna declines. When the Kuru King asks the reason of Krishna's rejection, Krishna explains how he will be able to eat and accept worship only after the success of his mission. Duryodhana insists further but Krishna holds his virtue of performing his role as a messenger here and leaves the royal court and directs his steps towards the abode of Vidura.

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Section XCII (92)

Vidura informs Krishna about the wrongdoings of Duryodhana and how stubbornly he is ignoring the wisdom of his elders and well-wishers and acting in accordance with his ego and lust for power. Vidura tells Krishna about Duryodhana's vain and firm belief that with the support of Karna (great warrior and dearest friend of Duryodhana), neither the Pandavas nor even the god Indra can ever defeat him now and thus he will never make peace with the Pandavas. Vidura is afraid that Duryodhana's ego, greed and lust for power would make peace unattainable. All the kings who have joined him, have done so in fear. In the end Vidura expresses his love and concern for the Pandavas.

Section XCIII (93)

After listening to Vidura, Krishna tells him that he is already aware of Duryodhana's intentions and yet has decided to perform the task of making him see reason for the betterment of everyone. Krishna is determined to try his best to bring about the good of Dhritarashtra's sons and of the Pandavas, as also of all the Kshatriyas on the face of the earth. Even if Duryodhana rejects Krishna's plea, at least Krishna will have the satisfaction of his own conscience. Krishna's intentions are to serve both the parties and save mankind. Krishna is not afraid of Duryodhana's reaction or that the latter may try to harm him. Duryodhana, with all the power he may possess is no match for Krishna. He would be like a herd of deer incapable of standing before an enraged lion.

Section XCIV (94)

The next morning, a band of choristers and bards wakes Krishna with melodious songs. Krishna, after taking a bath and performing the morning prayer rituals, receives Duryodhana and Sakuni (Duryodhana's maternal uncle). They invite Krishna to join the royal court. All the citizens have come out again to see Krishna and all the kings and royal guests have arrived at the court to meet him. Everyone is seated when Krishna enters. After greeting everyone, Krishna requests the court to invite the Rishis inside the court. Once the Rishis settle, the meeting that everyone is waiting for begins.

Section XCV (95)

Krishna starts his case by stressing on the dire necessity of peace to be established between the Kurus and Pandavas to avoid manslaughter and destruction at such an immense level. Krishna reminds king Dhritrashtra that the Kauravas, headed by Duryodhana, abandoning both virtue and profit, disregarding morality, and deprived of their senses by avarice, are now acting in the most unrighteous manner and if this results in war then nothing but great

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destruction on both the parties is inevitable. Krishna asks the King that no matter who wins, the King will suffer as even Pandavas are the sons of his dear brother Pandu, thus as dear to him as Kurus. Krishna requests the king and the Kuru clan to abandon the wrath and enmity and let these kings, great warriors and armies return to their respective homes. Krishna reminds the king of his duty as a father that if a child goes on a wrong path, then it is his father's responsibility to bring him back. The Pandavas are only asking for their share of the paternal kingdom. Krishna reminds everyone of the great misery that the Pandavas have endured by living in the woods for twelve years and living in hiding in the last year of their exile as it was decided. They have completed their side of the bet and now it's time for the Kurus to honour their words.

1.4.1.1 Check Your Progress

1. What was the reason for Krishna's visit to Hastinapur?
2. Why does he persist in his peace efforts despite knowing Duryodhana's intentions?
3. How does he present his case in the court of Dhritarashtra?

1.4.2 The Stories of Dambhodhbhaya and Matali (Sections XCVI-CV)

Section XCVI (96)

The assembly is silent, and no man could dare reply to that speech of Krishna. Jamadagnya (Parashurama) recites the story of a King named Dambhodbhava who once ruled the earth and enjoyed immense power. In pride, regularly he gathered Brahmanas and Kshatriyas and asked them amusingly whether there was anyone on earth more powerful than him. Once the Brahamanas revealed two names Nara and Narayana and claimed that these two were superior to everyone including the great king. The king brought his army to the mountains of Gandhamadana and found the two rishis, Nara and Narayana. After much denial, the two rishis defeated the king and ordered him to relinquish his pride and follow the path of righteousness. Jamadagni's son claims that these two rishis are Arjuna and Krishna in this birth, and no one can defeat them.

Section XCVII (97)

Rishi Kanwa also speaks in the assembly and reminds Duryodhana and everyone about the divine Vishnu and his eternal power. He urges Duryodhana to make peace with Yudhishthira and suggests that the Pandavas and the Kauravas can both rule. The Rishi then tells a story of Matali's (great charioteer of God Indra) search for a bridegroom for his beautiful daughter,

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Gunakesi. From this point on a narrative within a narrative begins and we are told the story of Matali. The story is about how Matali struggles to a great extent in search for a husband for his daughter. After considering the Daityas and Gandharvas, men and numerous Rishis, none appealed to Matali as an eligible husband for his daughter. He then starts d his journey to the world of Nagas to find a suitable match for his daughter.

Section XCVIII (98)

Rishi Narada, who was going to pay a visit to Varuna (God of the waters) meets Matali and finds out about his quest to find a suitable husband for Gunakesi. Rishi Narada asks Matali to let him join his quest Both of them meet and inform Varuna about their search and leave . Narada starts informing Matali about whatever they encounter in their journey in the world of Nagas. From Varuna's son Pushkara to blazing weapons such as Vishnu's discus and umbrella of the Lord of Waters; Narada describes them all and then suggests they leave the place and carry on their journey or else their main purpose may suffer.

Section XCIX (99)

Narada then starts informing Matali about the city Patalam, situated in the very centre of the world of the Nagas and worshipped by Daityas and Danavas. He apprises Matali about the Asura Fire, which is fed by water, the horse headed son (Vishnu) of Aditi, elephant Airavata who takes cool water from the city in order to impart it to the clouds. It is that water which Indra pours down as rain. It was here in the city Patalam where Mahadeva (God Shiva) practised the severest of ascetic austerities for the benefit of all creatures. Matali is unable to find any eligible match for his daughter and they move forward.

Section C (100)

They reach Hiranyapura, a city possessing a hundred diverse kinds of illusions belonging to Danavas. Narada informs Matali about the Asuras, Rakshasas and Danavas who live there. Their homes are made of silver and gold, with fine architecture decorated with gems. Matali tells Narada that he cannot consider a Danava to be his daughter's husband as he and his daughter belong to heaven and there can never be a union among Devas and Danavas. Having said this, they both continue their journey towards another place.

Section CI (101)

Narada and Matali reach a place which belongs to the birds, descendants of Garuda (charioteer of Sun god, Surya) with excellent feathers. They all subsist on snakes. Born of Kasyapa's line and enhancing the glory of Vinata's race, many winged creatures, the foremost of their species, have by begetting children founded and increased a thousand dynasties of

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birds, all endued with nobility of blood. Worshippers of Vishnu, by their acts they may be said to belong to the Kshatriya order, but they are all without any compassion, subsisting as they do on snakes. They never attain to spiritual enlightenment in consequence of their preying on their kinsmen. Upon realizing that Matali is not keen to find a mate for his daughter in this region, Narada takes him to another land.

Section CII (102)

The next region they visit is Rasatala, the seventh stratum below the earth. This region belongs to Surabhi, the mother of all kine (Cows), she, who was born of the Amrita. A single jet only of her milk, falling on the earth, created what is known as the sacred and the excellent "Milky Ocean." From her are born four other kine named, Surupa, Hansika, Subhadra and Sarvakamadugha. They all support the four quarters (Dikpali) of the ocean. The gods, uniting with the Asuras, and making the Mandara mountain their pole, churned the waters of the ocean and obtained the wine called Varuni, and the Goddess of Prosperity and Grace called Lakshmi, and Amrita, and the prince of steeds called Uchchhaisrava and the best of gems called Kaustubha. Those waters, which yielded these precious things had all been mixed with the milk of these four cows. Those who live in Rasatala consider it to be the happiest place of all.

Section CIII (103)

They enter the city, Bhogavati ruled by Vasuki (the king of the Nagas). The Shesh also dwells here who with 'ascetic austerities', his thousand heads and great strength, supports the vast earth. The city is home to innumerable Nagas (sons of Surasa). Some having a thousand heads, some five hundred, and some three and all of them are possessed of huge bodies that resemble the mountains stretching over the earth. Matali notices one Naga, Sumukha, a prince who belonged to the Airavata race. Matali shows keen interest in him to be his Son-in-law. Narada informs him of the prince's noble parentage. He is born in the race of Airavata and is the grandson of Aryaka and son of Chikura.

Section CIV (104)

Narada introduces Matali to the king of Nagas with great respect and honour. Listening about their proposal and identity of Matali, the king becomes extremely happy but expresses regret in not being able to accept the offer since they are in a dire situation as the prince's life is already in danger. The king's son i.e., Samukha's father Chikura has been recently killed by Garuda, son of Vinata and now it is Sumukha's turn in a month to be killed similarly. Upon hearing this, Matali decides to take Sumukha with them to heaven. They reach heaven and meet Sakra, the chief of the gods attending Vishnu in the court. After listening to the whole

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matter, Vishnu suggests that Amrita should be given to Sumukha to make him immortal. Sumukha obtains the boon and marries Gunakesi.

Section CV (105)

Rishi Kanwa continues the story by telling Garuda's reaction, who becomes extremely angry after hearing the news. He quickly comes to Vasava (another name of Indra) and shows his anger and disappointment in the utmost respectful manner to the celestial god. Garuda compares himself to Vishnu in power but when Vishnu places his arm on Garuda's shoulder, the latter is unable to bear the weight and falls down and realizes his foolishness of comparing himself to the divine Vishnu. His pride and his vanity are both put in place. From that time, Garuda lives in friendship with Sumukha. Rishi Kanwa ends the story with the message of friendship and repentance that should be followed by the eldest Kuru as well. Duryodhana dismisses the whole argument with a loud laugh.

1.4.2.1 Check Your Progress

1. Who is Mitali and what is his quest?

1.4.3 The Story of Galava (CVI – XXIII)

Section CVI (106)

Seeing Duryodhana's reaction, Krishna, Bhishma and Narada try to counsel him. Narada stresses on the importance of listening to the counsel of friends and close ones. Narada warns against obstinacy which should be avoided as it is fraught with evil. In this connection he narrates the story of Galava who suffered a lot due to his obstinacy. The story begins with how Viswamitra was once tested by Dharma. Dharma disguised himself as the great Rishi Vasishtha and came to Viswamitra and asked for food. Viswamitra struck with awe, began to cook Charu (rice and milk). And in excitement and concern he took too much time in preparing the food, he could not properly wait upon his guest. When he finally brought the dish, the Rishi had already dined. He told Viswamitra to wait there until he comes again. Viswamitra waited for hundred years standing at the same spot. An ascetic named Galava waited upon him. Finally, Dharma came back and blessed Viswamitra with the status of a Brahmana. Viswamitra was pleased with the services of his disciple and told him he was free to go where he wished. Galava, before leaving insisted repeatedly on giving a gift to Viswamitra, for being his preceptor. He also said that by doing so he will himself obtain emancipation and enjoy the fruits of heaven. Viswamitra felt angry at Galava's obstinacy and asked for eight hundred steeds, each one of which should be as white as the rays of the moon, and each one of which should have one ear black.

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Section CVII-CXII (107-112)

Narada continues the story and tells how Galava was filled with such anxiety that he could not sit, lie down or even take his food. Without any solution coming to his mind, he was crying to the gods while ready to take his own life. His friend Garuda appeared and took him to the celestial realm where he presented the four quarters (eastern, southern, western and northern) and asked which quarter they should explore first in search of the steeds. Purva (Eastern)? The most auspicious one or Dakshina (southern) which Vivaswat (the current Manu – the progenitor of humans) gave away as a present (Dakshina) unto his preceptor. Or the Paschima (Western)? The favourite one of King Varuna, the ruler of the ocean. And lastly, Uttara (Northern)? The quarter that saves from sin and where one attains salvation. After carefully listening about every quarter, Galava requested Garuda to take him to Purva (eastern quarter). Garuda took Galava on his back and the journey began.

Section CXIII (113)

They found a mountain called Rishabha and decided to rest there. They met a lady named, Sandili. She offered them food and inquired about their quest. After taking rest, Garuda found that his wings had fallen off. He realized that it was due to the impure thought of taking this lady to the heaven with them. Sandili forgave Garuda and he got his wings back. After they took leave from Sandili, they were unable to find the kind of steeds they were looking for and stumbled upon Viswamitra. The Rishi inquired about the steeds which made Galava sorrowful.

Section CXIV-CXIX (114 – 119)

Seeing his friend worried and hopeless, Garuda pointed out to Galava that without wealth there is no chance of acquiring the promised steeds. He took Galava to King Yayati who had immense wealth. After finding out Galava's problem, King Yayati suggested to Galawa to take his daughter who possessed beauty equal to celestial beings. The king tells them to give his daughter's hand to that king who will give those eight hundred steeds that Galawa is searching for. Galawa takes Madhavi with him and offers her hand to King Haryyaswa of Ikshaku's race. After seeing Madhavi, Haryyaswa became ready to marry her and produce a child with her but could only give two hundred steeds of kind that Galava was looking for. Madhavi informed Galawa about the boon she received from the reciter of Brahma that would make her a maiden after every child delivery. After she gave a son to Haryyaswa, Galawa took her to King Divodasa. The king settled with the same condition as the previous king and married Madhavi to beget a son. Same arrangement was made with King Usinara but by the fourth time Garuda stopped Galawa to make another deal as there were no such steeds now available with anyone. He advised Galawa to take six hundred steeds and

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Madhavi to Viswamitra and offer Madhavi as a compensation for the rest of the two hundred steeds. Galava did so and Viswamitra accepted the steeds and Madhavi. She bore him a son named, Ashtaka. Galava then returned Madhavi to her father in the end and went into the woods.

Section CXX-XXIII (120 – 123)

King Yayati with a wish to settle his daughter permanently, arranged a grand swayambar for her which was attended by Nagas, Yakshas and humans. Madhavi however, chose to live a life of celibacy and adopted the deer's mode of life. King Yayati after living for thousands of years left the earth for heaven and stayed there for thousands more. Until one day, due to his vanity, ignorance and pride, he mentally disregarded all the gods, Rishis and all human beings. He was thrown out of the heaven as a punishment and ended up on earth once again. On earth, four kings (Madhavi's sons) - Pratardana, Vasumanas, Sivi (the son of Usinara) and Ashtaka assembled together in the woods of Naimisha and the king Yayati fell amongst them. Madhavi, in the guise of a deer also arrived there and saw her four sons and father. After realizing her father's state, she suggested that due to the virtue that she has gained in the woods and the virtue of her four sons, Yayati can again attain a place in heaven. Galava also arrived and happily agreed to help Yayati just like Madhavi and her four sons. The king regained his celestial form and went to heaven once again. The king realized his mistake when the heavenly being told him how the heaven region can never be rendered eternal by vanity, pride of strength, malice, deceitfulness, or deception. He told Yayati to never disregard those that are inferior, superior or in the middle station. There is not a greater sinner than he who is consumed by the fire of vanity.

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1.4.3.1 Check Your Progress

1. What is the story of Galawa?
2. What was the reason for King Yayati's fall from heaven and what brought him back to the celestial world?

1.4.4 Renewed Attempts to Counsel Duryodhana (CXXIV - CXXIX)

Section – CXXIV (124)

After listening to the story, Dhritarashtra speaks that he agrees with Krishna and others but has no power over the matter as his eldest son disobeys his command and is not ready to change his mind. Dhritarashtra requests Krishna to again counsel Duryodhana and bring him

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on the right path. Krishna tells Duryodhana that it is for his own good to avoid war and make peace with Pandavas. Krishna stresses on the fact that Duryodhana should listen to all the wise men speaking today as they all are his well-wishers, and their counsel is based on their wisdom experience and concern for the humanity. Krishna reminds Duryodhana that the Pandavas have always acted generously towards him, and they are ready to forget the past and make peace with him. Krishna speaks of Arjuna (Son of Pandu and one of the Pandavas), his skills as a warrior and how he has defeated the powerful warriors in the past. Making peace with the Pandavas and acting according to all the wise men's counsels, Duryodhana will save himself from the biggest mistake he can ever make.

Section – CXXV-CXXVI (125-126)

Once Krishna completes what he has to say, Bhishma (Supreme commander of the Kaurava forces and the son of Santanu) speaks next and requests Duryodhana to follow Krishna's advice and make peace with Pandavas. Bhishma tries to make an emotional appeal to Duryodhana by asking him to think about his parents, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari. All the destruction that the war will bring upon the Kauravas will be a matter of unthinkable grief for them. Drona (royal preceptor to Kauravas and Pandavas) agrees with Bhishma and tells Duryodhana that he also believes that Arjuna is the greater warrior in the opposite side of the war and Krishna is someone that even gods will not fight with. Thus, Duryodhana should do what is best for Kauravas and the rest which is to follow Krishna's advice. Vidura also speaks in favour of peace and shows his concern towards Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. Dhritarashtra tells Duryodhana to not let the opportunity for peace go by and to drop the idea of war with the Pandavas. Bhishma and Drona again address Duryodhana and emphasize on each Pandava's unmatchable skill as a warrior and the skills of all those who are on the Pandavas' side.

Section CXXVII (127)

After listening to everyone in the assembly, Duryodhana blames Krishna and others for being harsh on him. He is unable to see any of his fault as according to him, the Pandavas were the ones who staked everything in the game of dice. Duryodhana's excuse is that being a Kshatriya it is his duty to prove himself in the field of war and never bow down to anyone but the Brahmanas. Blinded by power and his self-destructive ego, Duryodhana stubbornly refuses to give anything to the Pandavas - not even a speck of land as small as the point of a sharp needle.

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Section CXXVIII (128)

In reply to Duryodhana, Krishna angrily asks him whether he genuinely believes he hasn't done anything wrong. He reminds the assembly how the Kauravas and Sakuni cheated and trapped the Pandavas in the game of Dice and the sin they committed by insulting the honour of their sister-in-law. He asks them to recall what Draupadi had to go through and the coarse language that was used to address the royal queen from the noble family with highest virtues. Krishna reminded the assembly of another incidence where the Kauravas tried to burn the Pandavas and Kunti and narrated other events when the Pandavas' lives were endangered. . Krishna advocates for Pandavas when he reminds the assembly that even after going through so much, the brave Pandavas are trying to solve the matter with peace. Krishna puts Duryodhana to shame for not listening to his parents and other great advisors in the assembly thus disrespecting them in front of everyone.

Krishna reminds the assembly about the fate of Kansa (son of Ugrasena and Krishna's maternal uncle), who just like Duryodhana lived a life of vanity, sin and vices. He talks about the superior divine's decision of separating the Devas and Asuras and putting Devas in heaven due to their virtues. Krishna again raises the concern of what this war could result in.

Section - CXXIX (129)

After listening to Krishna, King Dhritarashtra asks Vidura to bring Gandhari to pacify Duryodhana and urge him to follow the right path. Gandhari does what is required of her and brings Duryodhana back to the assembly and warns him to not let lust, wrath and delusion take charge over him. She appeals to Duryodhana to listen to the counsel of all the wise men in the assembly and follows Krishna's instruction. She suggests that if Duryodhana truly wants to be the greatest then first he needs to listen to the great minds and follow their teachings. According to her, there is no good in battle, no virtue, no profit. She tells Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas and give them back what is rightfully theirs.

1.4.4.1 Check Your Progress

1. Why does Dhritarashtra request Krishna to counsel Duryodhana once again?
2. What does Krishna say to Duryodhana at this stage?
3. Do you think Bhishma is in favour of war? What does he say to Duryodhana?
4. What does Duryodhana say in his defence?
5. What is the difference between the Pandavas and Duryodhana as pointed out by Krishna?
6. What is Gandhari's advice to her son?

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1.4.5 Krishna's Godliness Revealed (CXXX – CXXXI)

Section CXXX (130)

Duryodhana disregards his mother's advice and goes away from the assembly once again. Sakuni suggests to Duryodhana that they should seize Krishna. He conspires with other Kauravas that once Krishna is captured the Pandavas will lose heart and become incapable of exertion. While they are discussing the plan, Satyaki (Yadava warrior of Vrishni clan) finds out about it and informs Krishna and others in the assembly. Everyone laughs over it, knowing very well that no one will be able to seize the divine Krishna. Dhritarashtra is filled with anger and wants to school his son. He asks Vidura to bring Duryodhana in the assembly. When Duryodhana arrives, Vidura reminds him how, in the past, many others like Dwiveda, and Naraka had tried to seize Krishna but had failed. Vidura sings the praise of Krishna who held up the mountains of Govardhana on his little finger for protecting the kine from a continuous rain.

Section CXXXI (131)

Krishna laughs over the situation and transform himself in his divine form. His body resembling a blazing fire, issue myriads of gods, each of lightning effulgence. On his forehead appear Brahman and on his breast Rudra. On his arms appear the regents of the world, and from his mouth issue Agni, the Adityas, the Sadhyas, the Vasus, the Aswins, the Marutas, with Indra, and the Viswedevas. Arjuna standing on his right and Rama on his left, armed with the plough. Behind him Bhima, Yudhishthira and the two sons of Madri, and before him are all the Andhakas and the Vrishnis with Pradyumna and other chiefs bearing mighty weapons upraised. From the pores of his body issue sparks of fire like unto the rays of the sun. And beholding that awful form of the high souled Krishna, all the kings close their eyes with affrighted hearts, except Drona, and Bhishma, and Vidura. Celestial drums beat in the sky and a floral shower falling upon him. The whole Earth starts trembling and the oceans are agitated. Krishna leaves the court and everyone in the assembly follows him. Before taking leave from the king Dhritarashtara, Krishna reminds everyone about what has happened in the assembly. How Duryodhana in his wickedness has disregarded everyone and left the assembly in anger many times. Krishna also acknowledges King Dhritarashtra's helplessness over the matter. On his grand chariot, Krishna proceeds to meet his paternal aunt, Pritha.

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1.4.5.1 Check Your Progress

1. What is Sakuni's plan in order to defeat Pandavas?
2. Who is Satyaki and what does he find out about the Kauravas?
3. What does Krishna do after finding out about Sakuni's plan?
4. What are Krishna's parting words to the assembly?

1.5 ANALYSIS

The above segment belongs to that part of the epic *Mahabharata* when the Pandavas return after completing their twelve years of exile to which they had been sent after losing everything in a bet while playing the game of dice with the Kauravas. The Pandavas now desire to get their share of kingdom back failing which they are willing to wage a war to get what is rightfully theirs. Duryodhana on the other hand is in control of his ego and lust for power. In pride and vanity, he disregards everyone who tries to bring him to the right path. He is determined to wage war and destroy the Pandavas.

The Pandavas, though ready for war with all the skills and manpower to win it, still want to adopt a peaceful path as the enemy is none but their own family and a war would mean they would have to raise their weapons against their own blood relations. Everyone on both sides is aware that the war will bring nothing but destruction on a grand scale. Millions of deaths, devastation all around, unprecedented suffering of man and beast and in the end, if victory comes it will be at the cost of annihilation of their own kith and kin. As a last resort, Krishna comes to Hastinapur bearing the message of peace. Though completely aware of Duryodhana's intentions and also of the outcome of the meeting, Krishna still decides to perform his dharma by trying to avert war and save the millions of lives that would otherwise be lost.

The concept of Dharma plays a crucial role in *Mahabharata*. Dharma guides one towards the path of righteousness. It teaches you the way in which you are intended to live your life, based on your individual temperament and constitution. This has nothing to do with the concepts of good or bad. It has to do with living your life's purpose and being fully aligned with your innate nature. All the characters have their own model of Dharma in this epic. As a messenger from the Pandavas' side, Krishna is fulfilling his dharma by proposing peace between the Kauravas and Pandavas. The implication of Dharma is that there is a right or true way for each person to conduct their life in order to serve both themselves and others. On the

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other side, Duryodhana advocates his Kshatriya Dharma which allows him to fight against an opponent in war. This is problematized here because Duryodhana's intention is not to fulfil his Dharma as a warrior but to seize everything from the Pandavas. He is ready to sacrifice the whole Kaurava clan, other members of the family and army, not realizing that even if he wins, he would be ruling over devastation. The war would bring nothing but death and destruction on both sides. Both the parties have their own understanding of Dharma and the respective paths they choose are based on their "free will."

Free Will is our capacity to make decisions in life and express our desires to the universe. What we do with our free will shapes our Karma. Karma literally represents cause and its effect. In this sense karma can be explained as what you do in life comes back to you. Whatever situations you face in life result from what you did previously for that situation to be brought to you. Duryodhana's way of living and his actions towards others brings him face to face with his Karma in the end. His actions bring the Kauravas' to their doom. From cheating the Pandavas, dishonouring Draupadi in the royal court to being governed in life by deceit, vanity, treachery injustice and other vices, the fate of the Kaurava clan is sealed by their Karma.

There are references to Fate in the narrative. Dhritrashtra expresses his inability to stop the course of events because he says it is fated to happen. Fate, however, is what happens when you have weak will-power and lack of ability to follow through on what you know is right and best for you. When Duryodhana uses his free will to make bad decisions, his Karma brings about his fall. The drive inside him to fight a war against Pandavas is not derived from his Dharma as a Kshatriya but his jealousy towards them and his endless hunger for power. He fails to follow his Dharma as a brother, a son, a Kshatriya and even as a human being. Fate, not to be confused with destiny is the result of our actions. Modern writers and scholars have given us various insights into the discussions in the *Mahabharata*. Ramdhari Singh Dinker's poem "Krishna Ki Chetavni" has dealt with the concept of fate where Krishna declares Duryodhana's defeat after he tries to seize Krishna, the peace messenger, in the assembly. Another example, is King Yayati's fall from heaven where his fate is a consequence of his Karma. Garuda losing his wings on a mountain is the outcome of his impure thoughts regarding Sandili. Fate catches up with a person as a consequence of his/her Karma. Fate should however not be confused with destiny.

Destiny has two meanings attached to it. On an individual level, it is the greatness that comes to you in life, based on how well you navigate your karma and dharma through free will in order to live your life's purpose. Destiny happens when you learn the lessons from karma and use all of your life's experiences as a way to support your life's purpose. From

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Garuda's realization of Vishnu's power after getting defeated by the divine to Pandavas' victory in the end as they always followed the path of Dharma, truth and virtues we see Destiny in play. Duryodhana fails again and again when he doesn't learn from the outcome of his actions. People close to Duryodhana such as his father (King Dhritrashtra), mother (Queen Gandhari), Bhishma and Vidura try to counsel him but Duryodhana disregards everyone as he is blinded by his ego. All these people know that he is making a dire mistake which can bring profound destruction and make sure to mention this several times.

In universal terms, Destiny stands for what is already decided by the divine. Something that is bound to happen. Many writers have discussed the destiny factor in the *Mahabharata*. It is interesting to see how some modern writers and readers interpret and understand the concept. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni for instance, in her novel, *The Palace of Illusions* (also known as *Panchaali's Mahabharata*) calls all the characters resting in heaven in the end as "actors who have successfully concluded their roles in a great drama." (Divakaruni, 358) Here the concept of destiny indicates that everything that happened in the epic was predestined and everyone was playing their already decided part. In this context the whole concept of free will is challenged. John Calvin in his seminal work of systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has discussed the concept of free will and predestination where he argues that it is boastful to imagine that man is the master of his will. He advocates that free will is not the only force that governs human life. Calvin believes in a moderate approach, where he accepts that free will exists, but as a gift from God. When we focus on the *Mahabharata*, again we can notice that everyone's fate was a result based on his/her actions. Krishna comes to offer peace instead of war, but it was Duryodhana's will to choose war and the outcome is the consequence of his actions. Even if the great war was predestined then the fate of Kauravas and Pandavas is the result of their Karma. Pandavas always followed the path of Dharma and virtues whereas Kauravas ignored it and were driven by jealousy, ego and lust for power. Their destiny was designed by their own Karma.

1.6 Themes

1.6.1 Dharma

Dharma as a theme plays a crucial role in *Mahabharata*. The principle is discussed at length in the portion known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. Every character in the epic has to deal with the responsibility of fulfilling his/her Dharma. Krishna plays his role as a peace messenger with an utmost dedication to fulfil his Dharma. Dhritarashtara and Gandhari, though parents of Duryodhana, adhere to righteousness and favour Krishna's advice when they go against their

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own son's wishes and counsel him to make peace with the Pandavas. On the other hand, Duryodhana fails to fulfil his Dharma when he lets his ego and lust for power control him which results in the disastrous war. He advocates for the dharma of a Kshatriya by choosing war over peaceful resolution but his excuse is a cover for his obsession with power and revenge. A Kshatriya's dharma is not just to fight but to fight for what is right. Duryodhan on the other hand wants to go to war with the Pandavas to deny them what is rightfully theirs. Thus, Duryodhana is not fulfilling his Dharma as a Kshatriya. He is not going to fight for honour and righteousness.

1.6.2 Storytelling

As the *Mahabharata* is itself a framed story, dictated by Vyasa, storytelling is foundational to the epic unfolding. But even within it, all manner of parables are recited to clarify moral matters and all the major events of the epic are recited by a character as either a first– or a second–hand account. Storytelling pegs the *Mahabharata* in the oral narrative tradition, but also gives a sense of the multitude of perspectives that necessarily shape the narratives of world's important events. In the above discussed portion of the epic, many stories are being told by several characters to educate, inform, warn or to make a point. For example, Jamadagnya (Parashurama) recites the story of a vain King Dambhodbhava. Rishi Kanwa tells a story of Matali's (great charioteer of God Indra) search for a bridegroom for his beautiful daughter, Gunakesi. Narada tells the story of Viswamitra, his disciple, Galava, King Yayati and his daughter Madhavi. All these stories are geared towards highlighting the importance of virtues and righteousness in one's life.

1.6.3 Importance of Virtues and Righteousness

With the stories of Dambhodbhava, Matali and Galava, *Mahabharata* highlights the importance of virtues in men. Any human who lets vanity, greed, lust for power or anger control him, is destined to fall from the grace of God. *Mahabharata* delivers a lesson for the readers to practice virtues and righteousness in their lives. On one hand, one can see the victory of Pandavas who followed the path of Dharma and were always on the side of righteousness and then on the other, defeat of Kauravas who never listened to the voice of reason and dharma, but practiced deception and lived a life filled with pride, vanity and ignorance. This works as a teaching for the readers to follow the path that leads to the divine and not to destruction.

1.6.4 Treatment of Women Characters

There are two women who are present in this portion of the epic. First one is Pritha (Kunti), mother of the Pandavas and wife of Pandu and then second is Queen Gandhari, mother of

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Kauravas and wife of King Dhritarashtra. Both women have very little to contribute in this portion of the story. Queen Gandhari brings Duryodhana back to the assembly to listen and pay heed to the counsel of his elders. Duryodhana disregards hers and everyone else's advice. Then, Pritha is shown in a state of grief and longing for her sons. Apart from these two, Draupadi, Gunakesi, Sandili and Madhavi also appear at various points in the narrative. Krishna reminds everyone in the assembly about how Draupadi, wife of Pandavas, was dishonoured by the Kauravas in front of the whole assembly.

Madhavi is the only woman character who plays an active role in her story when she eventually decides to choose celibacy over marriage. Madhavi, daughter of the King Yayati obeys her father's wish to help Galava. In Galava's quest, she gets exploited repeatedly. Galava gives her to three Kings each of whom marries her and has a son with her. Performing her dharma, Madhavi silently obeys her father and Galava but eventually takes a decision for herself by not marrying again thus not fulfilling her father's wish and finally taking a stand for herself. Women characters have truly little to do in this portion of the epic. They are mostly in the background and do not play a very active part and rarely have a voice of their own. Gunakesi marries where her father wishes; Madhavi helps Glalava because it is a question of her father's honour; she even helps her father regain heaven through her virtue. Madhavi asserts herself only when she chooses a life of chastity for herself in the end. A feminist reading of Madhavi's story would certainly see the patriarchal oppression at work in the exploitation of this woman in the name of filial duty.

1.6.4.1 Check Your Progress

1. What aspects of Krishna's character do we witness in this excerpt from the *Mahabharata?*
2. How does this section of the epic help us see the difference between the material and the spiritual approach to life?
3. Is Dharma linked to one's destiny? Illustrate with a few examples from the prescribed excerpt.
4. What is the purpose of the various stories within the narrative?
5. Critically comment on the story of Madhavi.

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1.7 SUMMING UP

Mahabharata, as an epic text teaches humankind to follow the life of Dharma. It is one's responsibility as well as destiny to fulfil his/her Dharma. The distinction between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, which also brings them to their respective end is whether they follow the path of Dharma in their life. The Pandavas win the war and acquire what is rightfully theirs and the Kauravas' clan is wiped from the face of the earth. The fact that the divine Krishna chooses to be with the Pandavas, signals that god supports only those who practice virtue and righteousness in their lives.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Dharma	–	religious and moral duty
Rishi	–	a hindu sage or saint
Danavas	–	demons
Kurus	–	Kaurava clan
Nagas	–	a member of a semi-divine race, part human, part cobra in form, associated with water and sometimes with mystical initiation.
Kshatriya	–	a member of the second of the four great Hindu castes, the military caste. The traditional function of the Kshatriyas is to protect society by fighting in wartime and governing in peacetime.

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Unit-II

KALIDASA, *ABHIJNANASAKUNTALAM*

Dr. Sundari Siddartha

STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives
2.2 Kalidasa
2.3 Study Guide
2.4 The Element of *Rasa* in Sanskrit Theatre
2.5 A Critical Analysis
  2.5.1 *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as a tragedy
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  2.5.5 The Dramatic Function of the Ring and the Curse
  2.5.6 The King's Painting of Sakuntala
  2.5.7 Sage Kanva
2.6 Self Assessment Questions
2.7 Suggested Reading

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This study material is based on one of the most popular Sanskrit plays in India, Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam.* The play has been translated into many languages and all references to the text in this study material are to the following edition: Kalidasa, *The Loom of Time: A Selection of his Plays and Poems*. Penguin Books: India, 1989. Students are advised to read the play closely before going through this study material. Its main objectives are:

- to help you appreciate *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as a Classical Sanskrit play;
- familiarize you with Sanskrit poetics;

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- draw your attention to Kalidasa's poetic expression; and
- to critically analyze Kalidasa's treatment of the popular legend from the *Mahabharata*.

2.2 KALIDASA

Kalidasa enjoys an unparalleled reputation as a poet, not only in India, but also the world over. Bound as they were in the very ancient language of Sanskrit and the old dialects of Prakrits, his works were nearly unknown beyond the peaks of the Himalayas and the seashores of India till in 1789 CE Sir William Jones broke the barriers of language, by translating the Kalidasa's *Abhijnana* into English. He was aware that the barrier was not limited to the language. The vistas opened up by the play were different, new, and yet intriguing in their universal pull. That was the beginning of globalization in this century. Sir William Jones rightly remarked "The tastes of men differ as much as their sentiments and passions and in feeling the beauties of art as in smelling flowers, tasting fruits, viewing prospects and hearing a melody. Every individual must be guided by his own sensations and the incommunicable association of his own ideas." The charm of a great classic as a work of art, in common with all great works of art, lies in its eternal freshness and novelty; and to each and every mind, a great work will reveal a new meaning and a new charm, which alone is the source of the joy one derives from reading it.

This enjoyment is termed as *Rasa*, the soul of poetry. Though basically a subjective experience, it depends to some extent on the props provided by the poet in his works; the plot, the characters, and the descriptions of the environment, which are helpful in arousing the emotions and sentiments of the readers/spectators. Hence the poets are termed as *Rasasiddah* (adept in arousing conditions). Kalidasa's fame as a poet and dramatist rests on his ability and skill to take his spectators to the peaks of enjoyment and poetic relish. This has resulted in the universal appeal of his play and eulogies from great scholars like Goethe and Rabindranath Tagore. M.R. Kale, a great scholar, in his introduction to the play *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, succinctly describes his poetic merits. He asks, "What is that in Kalidasa which establishes his undisputed claim to the highest honour which is thus bestowed upon him?" And answers "His poetic genius has brought Sanskrit poetry to the highest elegance and refinement. His style is peculiarly pure and chaste. It is inartificial and is characterized by brevity." An unaffected simplicity of expression and an easy-flowing language mark his writings, which are embellished with similes, unparalleled for their beauty and appropriateness, and pithy general sayings. His diction is marked by the absence of long

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compounds, involved constructions, overwrought rhetoric and artificial puns; Kalidasa excels other poets in his description of the sublime and the beautiful. It is a principle recognized by all modern critics that Nature must be the life and essence of poetry and in this respect; Kalidasa is essentially a poet of Nature (of course in the limited sense of the term which it is possible to attach to it, in those times of gay luxury and general prosperity). He describes with most effective touches the gorgeous scenery of the Himalayas; it's snow-clad and mineral covered summits, the peaks where sunshine ever reigns, the fragrant cool breezes blowing there; the wilds with the hunters, the musk deer, the potent herbs shedding luster at night, the *chamara* deer, and the Manasa Lake. His description of the Ganges and the peaceful hermitage life is very striking and life-like. His descriptive powers are great, and some of the scenes in the *Shakuntalam*, the *Meghaduta* and the *Raghuvamsa* are so enchanting as to hold his readers spell-bound. And as regards the Suggestive poetry, *dhvani-kavya* kind of poetry which suggests even more than what it expresses, he is a master of acknowledged skill.

We have very little knowledge about his personal life, and that is not authenticated. The poet has studiously observed complete silence about himself in his works. In the words of Hazlitt; "He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be." His poetical productions alone stand as an immortal monument to his poetic excellence. We can gather very little information about Kalidasa from external sources; but a few incidents related here and there in his works do have a distant bearing upon the history of his life. A time-honoured tradition, supported by internal and external evidence, associates the name of Kalidasa with that of the epoch-making King Vikramaditya of Ujjayini. The keen interest and admiration with which the poet describes the Mahakala temple, the Sipra River and other beauties of Ujjayini, unmistakably point to the conclusion that he must have been a native of that city. Kalidasa also demonstrates considerable acquaintance with court life in his works. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that there is no allusion in his writings to the goddess of wealth having ever frowned upon him, shows that he was in affluent circumstances. He was a Brahmana by caste and was a devout worshipper of Siva, though by no means a sectarian. He seems to have travelled a good deal, at least in Northern India. For, as Dr. Bhau Daji remarks, he is the only poet who describes a living saffron flower, a plant that grows in Kashmir. His graphic description of the Himalayan scenes looks very much like that of one who was an eyewitness. He admired field-sports, and describes their beneficial effects with the exactness of a true sportsman. Though fond of pleasures, he was not the unscrupulous voluptuary. He appears to have been against love-marriages, though always actuated with the most generous sentiments towards the fair sex. His works bear further testimony to his considerable acquaintance with

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the *Vedas*, the philosophy taught by the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Puranas*, and the systems of the Samkhya, Yoga and Vedantic Medicine and the rudiments of Astronomy.

The poet's excellent reputation inspired other unscrupulous poets to adopt his name as 'author' for their works. Thus, in Sanskrit literary history, there are many poets who bear the name Kalidasa. Generally, seven works are accepted as his: three plays, two epic poems and two lyrical poems. *Abhijnana Shakuntalam, Vikramorvashiya, Malavikagnimitram, Raghuvamsam, Kumara Sambhavam, Meghadutam* and *Ritusamhara.* The most convenient and reliable method of studying the development of a poet's mind and its relation to his productions would be to read his works in their chronological order. But we have no external evidence to ascertain the chronology. A safe guess is to place the least refined, *Ritusamhara* as the first and the most sophisticated, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* as the last.

The play dealing with the recognition (Abhijnana) of Shakuntala is aptly called *Shakuntalam or Abhijnana Shakuntalam.* It is a play in seven Acts, based on the well-known love-story of King Duhsanta and the maiden Sakuntala, as given in the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahabharata.* The scene of the first four acts is laid at sage Kanva's hermitage at the foot of the Himalayas, and later it shifts to the capital Hastinapura in Acts V and VI. The final act depicts sage Marica's hermitage on the Hemakuta Mountain. The story of the play, act wise, will serve as a base for a critical analysis of the play.

2.3 STUDY GUIDE

ACT I

After the Benedictory stanza invoking Lord Shiva, the Manager of the play has a dialogue with his consort. During the course of that, the play is introduced, and then King Duhsanta appears, in full hunting garb, followed by his charioteer. While the king is about to shoot his arrow at an antelope pursued by him, he is interrupted by an ascetic, who informs him that the animal belongs to the hermitage of sage Kanva (Kashyapa), and the sanctity of the place must not be violated by its slaughter. The king refrains from killing it and is then invited to receive such hospitalities as the hermitage could offer. Sage Kanva is away, but his daughter Sakuntala is there, who will certainly look after the guest's comfort. The king accepts the invitation, and asking his charioteer to wait outside, enters the hermitage. There he finds three girls of exquisite loveliness, watering the flowering plants and shrubs. He at once falls in love with Sakuntala, who is one of them. The other two are her companions Anasuya and Priyamvada.

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The king, who was hitherto concealed in the background, goes forth at a suitable point in their talk, and addresses them. In the course of the general conversation that ensues, he learns that Sakuntala is Kanva's adopted daughter, being born of the celestial nymph Menaka by the sage Visvamitra, and deserted by her natural parents. He thus discovers that she is of Kshatriya parentage, and therefore a suitable bride for him. He, however, does not reveal his true identity to them, intending to remain incognito for the present. In the meanwhile, news comes of an elephant running amok and causing damage, and at that the girls depart. Sakuntala too has fallen in love with the king and directs longing glances at him while leaving. The king departs with a heart overpowered by love.

Check Your Progress

1. How does King Duhsanta describe Sage Kanva's hermitage to his charioteer?
2. What does Anasuya tell the King about Sakuntala's parentage?
3. Why does the king offer Priyamvada his signet ring?

ACT II

The second act introduces the king in a lovesick condition. His companion, Madhavya, who is the court-jester, is trying in his own way to soothe and divert his royal master's mind. The king first of all directs the General of his army to stop the hunt and to order his followers not to disturb the hermitage. Then he tells the jester about his having fallen in love with Sakuntala. The king asks his companion to find out some means by which he can manage to stay in the vicinity, without arousing comment or suspicion. His problem is solved, quite unexpectedly, when some ascetics come and request the king to stay and look after the safety of their sacrificial rites, which are being disturbed by evil spirits. The king readily accepts the invitation. At the same time, he sends off the Jester to the capital, Hastinapur to be near his royal mother. Lest Madhavya talk and make his forest-love known to others, the king tells the jester, with an appearance of sincerity, that the affair of Sakuntala was a joke, and signified nothing.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does the king call off the hunt?
2. Why do the hermits request King Duhsanta to come and stay in sage Kanva's ashram?
3. Why does Duhsanta send Madhavya back to his court?

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ACT III

In the interlude, it is stated that Sakuntala is now affected by the malady of love, and is lying on a bed of flowers, with her two friends ministering to her. Then the king is introduced in a lovesick condition. He proceeds to the bower where Sakuntala and her friends are seated. Sakuntala confesses her passion for Duhsanta to them. The king takes advantage of this opportunity to enter and make a formal declaration of his suit. At this union of the lovers, the friends discreetly withdraw. Duhsanta proposes that they have a *gandharva* marriage. The lovers are alerted about the arrival of the elderly lady-ascetic, Gautami and bid adieu. The disconsolate king finds active work in his accepted occupation of keeping the evil spirits away from the sacrificial altars.

Check Your Progress

1. Identify and describe some figures of speech used to describe the love between Sakuntala and Duhsanta.
2. What is a *gandharva* form of marriage?

ACT IV

In the interlude, the conversation between the two friends reveals that Duhsanta has married Sakuntala by the *gandharva* form of marriage, and then leaves for his capital, after promising to send a suitable guard to bring his bride to his palace. When Sakuntala is alone in the ashram, her thoughts being away with her absent husband, she fails to offer proper hospitality to the choleric sage Durvasas, when he visits the hermitage. The hot-tempered sage curses her, saying;

> You who do not notice me,
> a hoard of holy merit
> standing at your door,
> because you are lost in thoughts of one
> to the exclusion of all else,
> you shall be lost in his thoughts:
> though you goad his memory hard,
> he shall fail to remember you,
> even as a drunk man remembers not
> thereafter, the tale he told before. (p. 215)

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Fortunately, her friends hear him, and Priyamvada pleads with him, and obtains a concession insofar that the curse would cease to have effect, on the production of some token of recognition. Since the friends know that Sakuntala has Duhsanta's ring as a token, they are relieved. And so, they decide not to say anything about the curse, even to Sakuntala.

After the Interlude, there is a passage of a few days before the next act begins. Priyamvada informs Anasuya that sage Kanva has returned to the hermitage. He has come to know, through a spiritual voice, about Sakuntala's marriage and pregnancy, and has approved of it. The sage arranges to send her to her husband's place. The whole scene, depicting Sakuntala's departure from the penance-grove, where she has resided so long, and where ties of affection bind every plant, creeper and animal to her is very touchingly portrayed. It also contains Kanva's well-known advice to Sakuntala on the duties of a wife and a mother.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is sage Durvasa angry with Sakuntala?
2. Why don't Sakuntala's friends tell her about the curse?
3. What advice does sage Kanva give to Sakuntala before she leaves the ashram?

ACT V

The scene shifts to Duhsanta's capital. The ascetics escorting Sakuntala arrive at the royal palace. After an exchange of greetings, the escorting sage, Sarngarava, conveys Kanva's message, requesting Duhsanta to accept his wife, Sakuntala. The king, under the influence of the curse, denies the whole affair, and even Sakuntala fails to rouse his curse-swept memory. As a last resort, she wants to show him his signet ring as a means of recognition but, as ill luck would have it, it has slipped off her fingers, into the river-waters. Mutual recriminations lead to nothing. Her escorts leave her to her fate and depart. The Royal priest takes the responsibility of her custody. But meanwhile a celestial lady descends and carries Sakuntala away. The king is left musing in a gloom of vexatious uncertainty.

Check Your Progress

1. Why does Duhsanta feel sad on listening to the song about the bee?
2. Why do Saradvata and Sangarava feel unwell on entering Duhsanta's palace?
3. What message does sage Kanva send for Duhsanta?
4. What happens to Sakuntala at the end of this act?

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ACT VI

A fisherman, whom the police accuse of theft, discovers the king's ring inside a fish. The king, whose curse is removed at the sight of the ring, of course, lets him off. He remembers his marriage with Sakuntala, whom he has repudiated. He is now deeply grieved, but is helpless. In the course of his sorrow, Sanumati, a friend of Menaka's, closely watches him. The king seeks to divert his mind but at every moment he finds his grief harrowing deep down into his soul. And to aggravate the situation, he receives a letter from his minister, announcing the death of a merchant named Dhana-Vredhi, who dies childless and whose property goes to the royal treasury. This leads the king to reflect pensively on his own state, without an heir, until his grief makes him unconscious. Matali, the charioteer of Lord Indra, the king of the gods, creates a welcome diversion at this time. He arrives with a message from his master to Duhsanta: to proceed forthwith to battle with certain troublesome demons, the enemies of Indra. Duhsanta assents and leaves in Indra's chariot.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is the fisherman arrested by the police?
2. Why had the king given his signet ring to Sakuntala?
3. Who is Dhana-Vredhi and what happens to him?
4. Why does Lord Indra send Matali to fetch King Duhsanta?

ACT VII

The king is successful in his expedition and Indra showers him with extraordinary honour. While returning through the sky, in the chariot driven by Matali, Duhsanta alights on the Hema-kuta mountains, where the holy sage Marica resides, and to whom the king wants to offer his salutations. At that hermitage, while Matali goes to seek Marica, the king comes across a young boy, the very image of himself, playing with a lion's cub. He feels a strange attachment to the child. In the course of a talk with the boy's attendant women, it emerges that he belongs to the Puru race (Duhsanta's race was Puru), and that his mother's name is Sakuntala. The king starts wondering whether the boy is his son. He picks up the boy's magical amulet, that only the parents could touch and, to the surprise of the ascetics there, it doesn't turn into a snake. In the meantime, Sakuntala enters. Mutual explanations follow and the pair is reconciled. Matali comes and takes them to meet Marica. The sage explains about

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the curse and the king is exonerated. A messenger is sent to inform sage Kanva of the happy developments and sage Marica blesses the couple and child.

Check Your Progress

1. What does King Duhsanta notice on the palm of the little boy in sage Marica's ashram?
2. Describe Sakuntala's appearance when she comes before the king?
3. What does sage Marica's predict for Sakuntala's son?

2.4 THE ELEMENT OF *RASA* IN SANSKRIT THEATRE

Dramatic art is basically visual but, according to Sanskrit poetics, the most important element of drama is *Rasa* or sentiment. There are many components, which help to bring about this flavour in drama. Bharata, in his *Natyashastra*, has succinctly listed all these components, which are varied and extensive.

The eight sentiments, or *Rasas* are the resultant of the cumulative and concentrated effects of the eight Dominant states (*xthayibhaava*); the thirty-three Transitory states (*Vyabhichari bhaava*); the eight Temperamental states (*Sattvika*); the four kinds of Histrionic Representation (*Abhinaya*); the two Practices of Representation (*Lokadharmi* and *Natyadharmi*), the four styles (*Vritti*); the four Local Usages (*Pravrtti*); the two kinds of Success (*Siddhi*); the seven Musical notes - vocal and instrumental types (*Svara*); the five kinds of *Dhruvas* (songs to the accompaniment of rhythm and dance); and the three types of Playhouses.

The detailed explanation of this process is condensed into small and concise couplets called *Sutras* (short rules). Thus, Bharata's *Sutra* on Sentiment has become renowned as its basic definition, which later scholars followed. Sentiment is an essential element of any creative speech. This Sentiment is produced (*rasa-nishpaltih*), from a combination (*samyoga*) of Determinants (*Vibhaava*), Consequents (*Anubhaava*), and Transitory States (*Vyabhichari bhaavd*).

The presentation of these Dominant States and their appreciation is the cultural aspect of every representation (*Naatya*), and forms the kernel of the dramatic composition and the very soul of every visual art. In human nature, there are numerous activities which give rise to

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various feelings. These die and rise again, creating transitory states of the human mind. Such transitory moods are varied and incapable of enumeration. So Bharata, with psychological acumen, has identified the most prominent of these mental states, by forming a group of thirty-three feelings, which are universal. These feelings are generated by certain causes, known as *Vibhavas* (determinants) and create certain effects/consequents (*Anubhavas*).

The presentation of different mental states by the characters on stage, gives rise to similar feelings in the hearts of the spectators. The symphonic reproduction of tones, imitation of gesticulations and modes of action, and an appropriate representation of situations through costumes, manners, outward bearing, and environment cause this harmony of minds. This is what is termed as the Emotional Response, leading one to the realm of bliss that springs from the enjoyment of Sentiment (*rasa*).

Bharata explains this fusion, leading to Sentiment, by giving an illustration from our daily life. As 'taste' results from a combination of various spices, vegetables and other articles, so does this Sentiment. Likewise, as ingredients such as raw sugar, spices or vegetables produce the six tastes that can be sensed by the tongue, so do the Dominant States produce Sentiment (*rasa*), when they come together with various other states (*bhavd*).

After explaining the process by which the various 'states' come together, Bharata proceeds to describe the act of tasting, which is a very subjective operation. The illustration is again that of food. "Just as well-disposed persons, while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices, enjoy its taste (*rasa*) and attain pleasure and satisfaction; similarly, cultured people taste the Dominant states (*Sthaayi Bhaavd*) when they see them represented through an expression of the various states, with words, gestures and temperament, and derive pleasure and satisfaction. It is said that there is similarity between the taste of food and the taste of drama. To differentiate one from the other, the taste of drama is called the *Naatya Rasa* (Taste arising in the visual art).

In this emotional blooming, the Sentiment and State have a unique relation. It is, indeed the Sentiment which comes out of the States and not vice-versa. Yet they are produced due to their mutual relation. Bharata uses the method of Etymology (*nirukta*) to explain the concept of Sentiment and State (*bhaavd*). States cause the sentiments (*Bhaavayanti*) to originate. Hence, they are called Originators (*Bhaavas*).

Bharata says, "Just as by many articles of various kinds, auxiliary cooked food (*vyanjana*) is brought forth, so do the states along with different kinds of Histrionic Representation (*abhinaya*), cause the Sentiments to originate." But the fact is that, in actuality, the States and the Sentiments cause one another to originate (*bhaavayanti*). It is

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fittingly explained by the example of Seed-Tree and the Seed. Just as the tree grows from a seed, and the flowers and fruits [including the seed] grow from the tree; similarly, the Sentiments are the source (root) of all the States. Likewise, the States exists as the source of all the Sentiments.

Rasa as the Emotional Response is only one. But when represented through the components, it takes on various hues, according to the feelings of the heart and mind. Human emotions can be categorized into four types: Erotic, Furious, Heroic and Odious. From these arise, respectively, the other four; namely, the Comic, Pathetic, Marvellous and Terrible.

Each of these eight have their own colour and their own presiding deity.

Sringaara	-	Erotic	-	Light green	-	Vishnu
Haasya	-	Comic	-	White	-	Pramatha
Karuna	-	Pathetic	-	Ash coloured	-	Yama
Raudra	-	Furious	-	Red	-	Rudra
Vira	-	Heroic	-	Light orange	-	Indra
Bhayaanaka	-	Terrible	-	Black	-	Kaala
Bibhatsa	-	Odious	-	Blue	-	Siva
Adbhuta	-	Marvellous	-	Yellow	-	Brahman

Bharata has described the eight Sentiments (*Rasas*) separately in detail.

1. Erotic (*Sringaara Rasa*)

This proceeds from the Dominant State of Love (*Rati*). Its base is attire, which is bright, white and pure. Hence an elegantly dressed person is called a lovely person (*Sringaari*). The Erotic is so named because of its association with bright and elegant attire. It owes its origin to men and women, full of youth. It has two aspects - Union (*Sambhoga*) and Separation (*Vipralambhd*). The **Determinants** of the Erotic are the pleasures of the season, garlands, unguents, ornaments, or going to a garden. The **Consequents** of the Erotic represented on the stage are many - such as clever movement of eyes and eyebrows, soft and delicate movement of limbs, or uttering sweet words. The **Transitory States** in the Erotic do not include fear, indolence, cruelty and disgust. The **Consequents** of love in Separation are indifference, langour, fear, yearning, dreaming and extremes like fainting.

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It is of three kinds: of Words, Dress and Action. [Though based on love, the Erotic sometimes manifests itself through Pathetic conditions]. Bharata explains this apparent anomaly. The ten conditions of the person-in-separation [from Indifference to Death-like-condition] are indeed pathetic. But the two (Pathetic and Erotic-in-separation) are different from each other:

(a) The Pathetic refers to a condition of despair, owing to affliction under a curse; separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death or captivity.

(b) The Erotic is based on separation and relates to a condition of persistent optimism, arising out of yearning and anxiety. [And this is the reason why the Erotic Sentiment includes, to an extent, conditions available in all other Sentiments.]

2. Comic (*Haasya Rasa*)

Dominant State/Emotion is laughter. Its **Determinants** are unseemly dress, impudence, greed, defective limbs and uncouth behaviour. The **Consequents** are throbbing of the lips, nose, cheek; opening the eyes wide; perspiration, colour of face etc. **Transitory States** are indolence, dissimulation, drowsiness etc. This sentiment (comic) is of two kinds: (a) Self-centred; and (b) Centred on others.

This is mostly seen in women and persons of the inferior type. The nature of laughter changes according to the type of person:

(a) To persons of superior type belongs Slight Smile (*Smitd*) and Smile (*Hasitd*).

(b) To those of the middling type, belongs gentle laughter *(Vihasitd)* and laughter of Ridicule (*Upahasitci*).

(c) To those of the inferior type, belongs vulgar laughter (*Apahasita*) and violent laughter (*Atihasita*).

Thus, the Comic Sentiment has six varieties. The Comic is of three kinds - of limbs, dress, and words.

3. Pathetic (*Karuna Rasa*)

The **Dominant State** is Sorrow. Its **Determinants** are affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, or death. **Consequents** to be presented on the stage are shedding of tears, lamentation, dryness of the mouth, loss of memory etc. **Transitory States** in it are indifference, languor, anxiety, dejection, insanity, epilepsy, or loss of

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voice. It is threefold: that rising from obstruction of lawful deeds; from loss of wealth; and from bereavement.

4. Furious (*Roudra Rasa*)

Dominant State is Anger. [It owes its origin to Rakshasas, Daanavas and haughty men and is caused by fights.] The **Determinants** are anger, rape, and abuse, insult, fighting, or drawing of blood. **Consequents** are red eyes, knitting of eyebrows, or defiance. Its **Transitory** States are presence of mind, determination, and energy; choking voice etc. [The reason for referring to Rakshasas in particular has been explained by Bharata; "Rakshasas are naturally furious, for they have many arms, many mouths, standing and unkempt hair of brown colour, and a prodigious physical frame and of black complexion. Even their lovemaking is violent. Thus, the people who imitate them, their fights and battles, give rise to the Furious Sentiment." It is threefold - of limbs, of dress and of deeds.

5. Heroic (*Vira Rasa*)

The **Dominant** State is Energy relating to superior persons. Its **Determinants** are presence of mind, perseverance, diplomacy etc., and **Consequents** are firmness, patience, heroism etc. The **Transitory** States are contentment, judgment, pride, agitation etc. It is threefold - arising from giving gifts, from doing one's duty (dharma) and from fighting (one's enemy).

6. Terrible (*Bhayaanaka Rasa*)

The **Dominant** State is Fear and the **Determinants** are hideous noise, sight of ghosts; panic, untimely hooting of owls etc. Its **Consequents** are trembling of hands, horrification, loss of voice etc., and **Transitory** States are paralysis, perspiration, choking voice, palpitation etc. [This is natural fear. In case of feigned fear, its representation should be milder.] It is of three kinds - feigned fear, fear from a wrong action, and fear from an apprehension of danger.

7. Odious (*Bibhatsa Rasa*)

Its **Dominant** State is Disgust. The **Determinants** are hearing of unpleasant, offensive and harmful words etc., and **Consequents** are vomiting, spitting, shaking of the limbs in disgust etc. The **Transitory** States are epilepsy, delusion, agitation, sickness etc. It is threefold - nauseating, simple, and exciting.

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8. Marvellous (*Adbhuta Rasa*)

The **Dominant** State is Astonishment and **Determinants** are the sight of heavenly beings or events, attainment of desired objects, entrance into a superior mansion, magical acts etc. **Consequents** are eyes opening wide, looking with fixed gaze, crying incessantly, waving the end of the dhoti or sari etc. The **Transitory** States are weeping, paralysis, choking voice, death etc. It is of two kinds - celestial and joyous.

Thus, Bharata explains Sentiment (*Rasa*) and the various moods and feelings, through which it is represented and enjoyed in Visual Art. This should help you appreciate *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, from the perspective of Sanskrit poetics. In this context, Kalidasa's poetic descriptions of the flora and fauna in sage Kanva's hermitage and the elaborate similes and metaphors used to describe the love between Duhsanta and Sakuntala acquire significance; they contribute to the erotic element (*Sringaara rasa*) in the play.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the concept of Rasa.
2. Scholars of Sanskrit drama have identified *Sringaara rasa* as the dominant *rasa* in the play. Would you agree?

2.5 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

2.5.1 *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as a tragedy

Tragedy is something sorrowful but *Sakuntalam* is a love-drama, where problems and obstacles create worry and anxiety; the separation of the hero and heroine causes heartburn, tears, and sorrowful situations. But these dejections and deceptions are not long lasting. That is why it is pointed out that real, hard-hitting sorrow is absent in this play. In Act II, the jester is sad because he is physically and mentally tired, and wrecked because of the king's antics. The ascetics are sad because the evil spirits are disturbing their sacrifices. In Act III, the two friends are sad and worried because their friend Sakuntala is lovesick. The king's anxiety about Kanva's consent to the marriage; Sakuntala's pregnancy; Durvasas' curse; Sakuntala's sorrow at leaving the hermitage; Kanva's sorrow at the separation from his foster daughter; the repudiation of Sakuntala by the king in Act V; real repentance and suffering and mental torture suffered by the king in Act VI; his sorrow at being childless; Vidushaka's bodily

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torture suffered at the hands of the disguised Matali- all these cause discomfort, anxiety, tears and pain. To that extent there is the sentiment of *shoka* but it cannot be termed as the emotion of *Karuna.*

Thus Kalidasa, in keeping with the theme of the play, has kept sorrow within limits and has juxtaposed it with joy and happiness, with the finale being the reunion of Duhsanta, Sakuntala and Bharata. The reason is not far to seek. Sanskrit drama is bound by convention and rules, which strictly maintain that drama is for entertainment and mental elevation. Thus, a tragic end cannot be approved or accepted in traditional drama.

Concept of Tragedy in Sanskrit Drama

Absence of formal tragedy is thus a peculiarity of Sanskrit drama. Tragedy, on the other hand, is a Western concept and in theory, it is a tale of disaster and death. It happens to a hero who, by certain qualities of action, thought and spirit is above the ranks of common men, a noble or exalted personage; in the Aristotelian sense. The hero is drawn into a conflict of great magnitude because, by his intention and action, he places himself in a position antagonistic to higher or superior powers. These may be external to the hero; like destiny, divine will or the established rule of earthly power, as in the Greek tragedies, or they may be internal forces, as in Shakespearean tragedy, representing a conflict of will within the heart of the hero. Such an opposition creates conflict and tension in the story.

The essence of the tragic delineation is that the hero, caught in the conflict, never runs away from it. The conflict may have originated from his initial error in doing a certain action, which in a cool moment of practical reasoning, he realizes he could have possibly avoided, or there may not be any awareness of an error on his part, in opposing superior forces pitched against him. Whatever it is, he has taken a step that he is not going to retrace. It leads to continuous struggle and acute suffering. But the hero goes through them with consistency and courage. He does not turn back even when death stares him in the face. The forces of opposition are mightier than the power of the hero. So, he is ultimately crushed in the struggle. This is the framework of a formal tragedy in Western literature.

The suffering and sorrow which are a necessary part of the tragic action, stem from a willful, unwise or erroneous action on the part of a hero. They do create pity or compassion in the mind of the spectator, who also experiences fear or awe at the terrible spectacle to which the action is leading. But there are other emotional reactions too, which are connected with such an experience. The uncommon courage, which the hero displays in his death-struggle with antagonistic powers, raises him to an extraordinary human level. While his suffering and death evoke our sorrow and sympathy, his courage in going down fighting, fills

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our heart with deep admiration and sublimity. It is this emotional reaction that lifts the sorrow and pity to the sublime level of art and assures aesthetic satisfaction.

It is obvious, therefore, that though sorrow is an integral part of the tragic experience, it alone does not make a tragedy unless the sorrow is not helpless suffering but is born of a fateful action, and unless it reaches the sublime level - through the undaunted and courageous fight of the hero, unto death.

This type of tragedy has no place in the theory of Sanskrit drama. The story/drama, according to Sanskrit aesthetics, just cannot culminate in the death of the hero. Sanskrit writers have accepted this prescription, partly out of respect for theory and critical opinion and partly because the spectators too, with their responses moulded by tradition and critical opinion, would not have tolerated utter disaster and the death of their well-loved and august heroes.

The concept of tragedy depends on what values the writers have and what their public is prepared to accept. Sanskrit writers did not attempt formal tragedy, and judging from critical opinion and actual dramatic practice, the readers and spectators too do not seem to feel that they had missed anything.

2.5.2 Depiction of Women in the Play

The story of the love of Duhsanta and Sakuntala is narrated at length in the *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharat*. There, Sakuntala is depicted as an assertive woman and one who stands up for her right and demands it. The story goes somewhat like this: Duhsanta, a king of the lunar race, in the course of his hunting excursion, reaches the hermitage of Kanva. His adopted daughter, Sakuntala being alone there, had to entertain the king, as was wont in those times. The king was fascinated by the matchless charms of the sage's daughter, from whom he learnt the story of her birth and parentage, and whose Kshatriya origin made it possible for him to marry her. Without much ceremony, the king expressed his desire to her, to which she yielded on his promise to appoint her son as his successor. He then wedded her by the *gandharva* form of marriage and, having stayed with her for some time, returned to his capital. Being afraid of the sage's anger, without whose knowledge the alliance had been formed, and who was sure to pronounce a curse if displeased with the match, the king did not send for his new wife. The sage, however, divining what had happened in his absence, approved the choice of his daughter who, in course of time, delivered of a son, and sent her to her husband without waiting for the king's summons. Duhsanta, afraid of public censure, disowned her. But a heavenly voice enjoined him to receive his wife and son, and Sakuntala was soon raised to the dignity of the chief or the crowned Queen.

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There is no denying the fact that this prosaic story, wanting in those dramatic elements which give effect and life to a play, has been dramatized by Kalidasa with that dramatic skill and mastery over his art, which have made him immortal as the Shakespeare of India. One strange similarity in the lives of these two poets is discernible. Shakespeare has nowhere originated the main plots of his dramas, but in his hands, they received life and meaning and made him what he is - the unrivalled master of his art. Kalidasa, too, selected a mythological love story to serve as the basis of his drama; fully conscious that such a story would have greater charm. His deep dramatic insight quickly saw that the story, though simple and unromantic in its form, was pre-eminently fitted to be the nucleus of such dramatic situations and incidents as would stir up the hearts of all men of poetic sensibility, and produce a magical effect upon them. The German poet Goethe's words of praise for the drama are indeed justified; "The soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted and fed."

This is the poetic aspect of the drama, which appeals to the heart. But every drama has characters in the story, and the incidents connected with them are usually a reflection of society. Viewed from this social point of view, we perceive that the characterization of Sakuntala, over the years, was eventually adapted to the image of a woman suitable to the ideals of the new middle class in the nineteenth century. The child of nature was an innocent girl who was led astray, but she remained submissive, long suffering, patient and devoted to her husband and was finally exonerated. Unfortunately, later centuries too went along with Kalidasa. The Sakuntala of the *Mahabharata*, who was a liberated woman, demanding to be justly treated, was sidelined. On the other hand, we have endorsed the more submissive Sakuntala of Kalidasa, a woman waiting patiently for recognition of her virtues.

Male chauvinism is revealed in the adaptation and recreation of the *Mahabharata* story in the play of Kalidasa, which conforms to contemporary vision. Probably, Kalidasa stopped at borrowing the kernel of the story and did not realise that his play would contribute to a gradual eroding of women's independence. After all, if society influences literature, it is also vice-versa. Sakuntala, as described in the drama, became the role model for an average Indian woman - patient, submissive, faithful even in the face of adversity, and suffering in silence. Other members of society expected her to be like that; and what's more – the women themselves were convinced that their role in society is to be good wives and mothers.

Though indirectly, this mindset was brought about by the literature of the times. To that extent, we have to concede that while adapting the story of the *Mahabharata*, Kalidasa has indeed contributed to the deterioration in the image of women. In the epic version, Duhsanta's refusal to accept Sakuntala is a tactical move, meant to precipitate a situation wherein he can legitimize their union. But Sanskrit drama needed a hero who is an ideal.

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Around him revolve the sentiments that flower into emotions in the hearts of the audience. The Duhsanta of the *Mahabharata* deliberately pretends ignorance of his marriage and repudiates Sakuntala. This would suggest a 'stain' on the character of the hero, which would not have been acceptable to the audience. So, the curse of the sage is introduced. The irresponsible behavior of Duhsanta is glossed over, as are the moral implications of his refusal to recognize Sakuntala. To exonerate him, Kalidasa introduces the curse; clearly to condone the king's conduct. There is also a suggestion that Sakuntala erred in agreeing to a *gandharva* marriage and succumbing to her passion. The loss of the ring also constitutes an impediment to the union of the two lovers. Kalidasa's play was influenced by the need to create an effective drama.

The advice of sage Kanva in Act IV, as he bids Sakuntala farewell, reveals a rather subordinate position of women in society. Read these lines;

> Serve your elders with diligence; be a friend to your co-wives;
> even if wronged by your husband do not cross him through anger;
> treat those who serve you with the utmost courtesy;
> be not puffed up with pride by wealth and pleasures;
> Thus do girls attain the status of mistress of the home;
> Those who act contrary are the bane of their families. (p. 226-7)

These words may seem regressive to modern readers but remember that the culture depicted in the play is an ancient one. The historical context must be considered, in any evaluation of the play.

In spite of the introduction of two friends for Sakuntala, she is never shown as a weakling. She is the daughter of a Kshatriya (warrior), Vishvamitra and time and again Kalidasa has provided her with dialogues that reveal her dignity (Act I), propriety (Act III), anger (Act V) and pragmatic mindset (Act VII). But one can argue that even in such a setting, Sakuntala's angry outburst in Act V stands out as an act of assertion. When the King refuses to recognize her, her self-respect is wounded;

> *Sakuntala* (in anger): Ignoble man! You who are like a well covered with grass . . . . you judge every one by the measure of your heart . . . who would stoop to imitate your conduct . . . practicing falseness while putting on the mantle of virtue? (p. 239)

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2.5.3 The Prologue in a Sanskrit play

Sanskrit drama was an integral part of society and its values. It was not merely a short-lived source of entertainment, but had a message to convey to the audience. As such, a lot of preparation and precautions were taken in the presentation of the play.

Before beginning a show, the stage-manager (*Sutradhaara*) inspects the theatre and its surroundings. All the accessories are checked, parts are assigned and the Supreme-power is invoked for blessings for the completion of the enactment of the play, without any hindrances. This serves as a psychological morale-booster for all concerned. All these activities are carried out behind the curtain, away from the eyes of the audience.

The actual drama, that is visible to the audience, starts with the Invocation, a benediction invoking the grace of a deity. This verse, which is usually sung, serves as a point to rejoice and anticipate the beginning of the play.

What follows is the Prologue - a preamble to the actual drama. Either the stage-manager or another person introduces the occasion of the enactment of the drama, its title and the author. This person presents the prelude, in the course of which he introduces the subject matter of the drama as well. He usually refers to the critical sense of the audience in order to please them; and to the artistic skill of the actors to create interest in the performance.

Invariably, a song also forms part of the prologue in order to lend a musical background to the dramatic performance. This song is usually sung by the actress (*nati*) who comes as a partner to the stage manager. The prologue is seldom a monologue. The actor is accompanied by the actress or by another associate or by the clown/jester. By means of the dialogues between the two, the preliminary information about the play is given. The story is usually a historical piece or well-known folklore, which is fairly familiar to the audience. Coupled with this is the information provided in the prologue. This enables the audience to comprehend the strain of the story and enjoy it, right from the beginning.

This type of Prologue is seen in Goethe's *Faust* (said to be influenced by Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam*). We see modified and truncated versions of the Prologue even in modern plays, though the presentation is very different.

2.5.4 King Duhsanta

There were four castes in society at that time - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, in that order of merit. According to the social codes of that time, a man could marry a girl/ woman of the same caste or one from the caste lower to his. This was called the *Anuloma* marriage. But marriage with the female of a caste higher to one's own, was not permitted and

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hence it was termed as the *Pratiloma* marriage. Duhsanta, being an upright king, would not trespass social norms and limitations. And yet, his heart was struck with love for Sakuntala;

> King: I wonder . . . could she be the Patriarch's daughter by a wife not of his own class? Let's be done with doubts:
>
> She can rightly be a warrior's bride,
>
> For my noble heart yearns deeply for her. (p. 178)

In this context, he makes the above statement. The reason he gives for it is that a heart which is purified, and culturally and ethically sensitized right from birth, is incapable of harbouring any desire, which is improper or against moral standards. He means to say, "My heart is noble and correct. If this heart desires her, then it can be safely inferred that she is fit to be a warrior's bride."

He proves his point by saying that whenever men of nobility are in doubt, it is their inner voice or their sixth sense, which serves as the determining authority. Duhsanta is confident that in his case too, it is so. We see that further developments in the play prove him right as Anasuya clarifies that Kanva is the foster-father of Sakuntala. The real parents are Vishvamitra (a Kshatriya by birth) and Menaka (an *apsara* - a celestial being). This statement of the king reflects the strong streak of confidence in his character, established on the basis of his power and a result of the upright life led by him.

Throughout the play, we are reminded of the fact that King Duhsanta is a descendent of the Puru clan. The references to his royal identity, duties, and responsibilities form an important thread in the narrative. To cite one example, in Act V, the Bard sings King Dushanta's praises;

> Grasping the rod of justice, you bring to heel
>
> Those who are set on evil paths; you bring calm
>
> Where contentions rage; and afford protection. (p. 231)

Recall how, in Act II, the hermits from sage Kanva's ashram seek his help to protect them from evil spirits, bent on disturbing their sacrificial rites. Read this incisive observation by Romila Thapar;

> There is in the play a rhetoric of political power based on the monarchical state. The fourth century A.D. was a period of well-established monarchies with their appurtenances of administration, revenue and coercive agencies. The court at Hastinapur is now the focus of those in authority and kingly authority was

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expressed in various ways, for example in the taking of impressive titles such as *maharaja-adhiraja.* This would have a quite different effect from the epic, where Duhsanta is referred to as the *gopta* and the *raja.* The duties performed by the king exceed that of simply protecting his subjects, as he is now responsible for their welfare, and for maintaining equilibrium in society. The latter is accomplished through a hierarchy of administration, in which the court is central, and is provisioned through taxes. The centrality of succession based on birth remained necessary to dynastic rule, and the legitimacy of succession continued to be a major concern.

The up grading, as it were, of monarchy is also suggested in the closeness of kings to deities, a feature common to many literary works of this time. Duhsanta (as he is named in the play) is called upon for assistance by Indra when the latter is threatened by *asuras.* The association between *rajas* and gods was earlier said to derive from the king being constituted of divine particles - a step towards his being seen as the human parallel to deity. Still later, claims would be made on occasion, to kings being an incarnation of deity, frequently Visnu. This did not mean creating an icon of the king to be worshipped as deity, rather such incarnations were often attempts at manipulating the power of the king. (p. 127)

Dushanta's yearning for a son is rooted in his anxiety that the Puru dynasty will end with him;

King (*overcome by sorrow*): from earliest times:

This, the dynasty of Puru, pure from its roots,

descending in one uninterrupted succession,

will now have its setting in my life, unfruitful,

like Sarasvati's stream lost in barbarous sandy wastes. (p. 261)

Succession is a major concern in the play and interwoven into the theme of romantic love. Note how, when Sakuntala is in Duhsanta's court, the issue of the paternity of her unborn child takes precedence over the legal status of the *gandharva* marriage, and the king accuses her of behaving like the *kokila* bird: "the cuckoo, as we know, has her young reared/ by other birds before they take to the air" (p. 239).

To conclude this section, I would like to draw your attention to the end of the play. Sage Marica predicts how Sakuntala's son Bharata will rule over the world and blesses the king;

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"May kings ever work for the good of their subjects" (p. 281). A play that began as a romantic love-story ends with the reinforcement of the power of the Puru dynasty, through sage Marica's predictions.

2.5.5 The Dramatic Function of the Ring and the Curse

The very title features the ring - *Sakuntala and the ring of recollection.* Thus, the ring has a very important function to play in the drama. Kalidasa has used the ring motif in a very effective way. In Act I, the king offers it to free Sakuntala from the debt of watering the plants that she owes to Priyamvada. This results in him being recognised as King Duhsanta. Again, in Act IV, we glean from the conversation of Anasuya and Priyamvada that the ring has been given to Sakuntala by Duhsanta as a token of remembrance. At this point, the ring becomes especially significant, as the sage Durvasas has cursed Sakuntala. On Priyamvada's entreaties he relents a bit and offers a way out of the curse: the king has to see some ornament of recognition to remember Sakuntala. The ring fits the bill. But, unfortunately, for reasons, which seem convincing to the two friends, they do not relate the details of the curse to Sakuntala. It is only a vague warning - "if the king fails to recognize you, show him the ring" (p. 227) Sakuntala takes it casually and fails to guard it safely. It falls into the river during her ablutions.

The absence of the ring at the crucial moment, when it is most needed, result in the brilliant exchange of words between Sangarava and the king in Act V. It also depicts the fighting spirit of Sakuntala and the upright character of the king. In Act VI, the fisherman discovers the ring inside the belly of a fish that he has caught. He gets his reward and the ring has detonated the curse. Duhsanta is plunged in sorrow and a pall of gloom settles on the entire scene. He remembers all the details of his union with Sakuntala and a sense of guilt gores him. The king reprimands the ring for having deserted the finger of his beloved. He recounts that he had promised to send someone to fetch her before she finished counting his name on the ring: one syllable each day. But he did not send anyone! This near-insane condition of the king, caused by the agony of separation, is emotionally very touching. This has been made possible because of the ring-motif.

Rabindranath Tagore and many other scholarly critics of this play have accepted the need for this suffering of the king. The love between Duhsanta and Sakuntala was passionate. It had to go through the fire of separation, to purify it and elevate it to represent it as the ideal of love. In Act VII, Sakuntala's eyes fall on the ring on the king's finger. He offers it to her once again but Sakuntala is wary. She refuses to have anything to do with it and it goes back on

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the king's finger. Later, when Sage Marica explains the curse as the reason for the king's non-recognition, she realizes why her friends had warned her and told her to use the ring.

Kalidasa based his play on the story from the *Mahabharata*; introducing the motifs of the ring and sage Durvasa's curse. The curse becomes an impediment to the union of the two lovers and the signet ring is a token of recognition. Read this commentary by Romila Thapar;

> Were the curse and the ring also introduced because they gloss over the real tension between Sakuntala and Duhsanta, namely, the paternity of her child? Sakuntala now does not have to defend the right of her son, since the flow of events is beyond human control. Duhsanta cannot be blamed for his behaviour as he is under a spell. On the king refusing to acknowledge Sakuntala as his wife, Sarngarava and Saradvata - the disciples of Kanva accompanying Sakuntala to the court-angrily accuse the king of being a liar, a thief and a king who wilfully opposes that which is his righteous duty. To all these accusations the king can innocently reply that he is not guilty, since he has no recollection of Sakuntala. By extension therefore, he is not going to allow a woman, however beautiful, to be imposed on him as his wife. Is Kalidasa avoiding the moral issue of condemning Duhsanta's action in rejecting Sakuntala, and would such avoidance not have been regarded as contemptible in those times? The epic version does at least raise the issue through the celestial voice; the play, on the other hand, introduces extraneous elements, which detract from commenting on the injustice of Duhsanta's treatment of Sakuntala. (p. 138)

2.5.6 The King's Painting of Sakuntala

Abhijnanasakuntalam is basically a romantic play, with the erotic sentiment being dominant. In such a play, the dramatic climax is usually the point that depicts the initial union/ falling in love of the hero and heroine. Obstacles and obstructions in the path of love usually follow this. The final denouement comes after the successful removal of all impediments. But this modus operandi is not a cut and dried method or a theoretical solution. It is a very subtle arrangement of incidents that the dramatist very skillfully manages. This brings about the ecstasy and emotional enjoyment of the connoisseurs of dramatic art.

In the beginning of Act VI, Kalidasa presents a scene drawn almost raw from life - the fisherman's discovery of the ring. This is followed by the tragic outburst of the king. The sight of the ring brings back the memory of Sakuntala. The king realizes the wrong unwittingly done to her. His helplessness, agony, guilt and sorrow are depicted in a very touching manner. The king seeks to console himself in various ways. One of them is his

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attempt to paint a panting of the beloved. As per his instructions, the attendant brings it to the garden for him to watch her picture, and try to mitigate his heartache.

This painting is used by Kalidasa to highlight the depth of the king's love and satisfy Sakuntala's well wisher Sanumati/Mirakesi that the king's love for Sakuntala is intact. The king feels that the portrait is not a worthy representation of the real beauty of Sakuntala. Kalidasa's knowledge of the fine arts is revealed a number of times in the various remarks of the king. "My tears have discoloured the picture," "The discoloured part has swelled up," "It needs retouching."

The extensive details that the king wants to put in and his desire to hold the painting in his own hand are indicative of his profound love. But what is really, tragically marvellous, is the way he forgets that it is merely a painting and asks the jester to drive away the "impudent bee." And even more touching is the way the jester too goes crazy and helps the king to carry on a conversation with and rebuke the bee in the painting. The disillusionment that follows Vidushaka's realization is even more pathetic.

For the king it is virtually the real Sakuntala. But now reality has again transformed Sakuntala into a picture! The play of words is a verbal delight. But the king has to accept that his tears will not allow him to view her even in a painting. All the remarks of wonder by Sanumati/Misrakesi at this lamentation of the king keep up the suspense and wonder element of the drama.

Further, it is the painting motif that is used by the poet to bring out the noble aspects of the characters of the king and the senior Queen Vasumati. When the king hears that Queen Vasumati is coming into the garden to meet him, he asks for the painting to be removed lest it hurt the feelings of the queen. [Books on Poetics have recorded that a king who is considerate to his former wife (first love) even while taking a new wife is called *Dakshina* (considerate, compassionate)]. The queen is really blue-blooded. When she sees the attendant carrying an official letter to the king, she desists from disturbing him. The king says, "She knows the importance of state business and avoids interrupting my duty."

Thus, a small token, a painting becomes a vibrant symbol in the deft hands of Kalidasa and helps to evoke varied emotions and expostulations, helping to bring to life characters, with whom the audience identifies easily, thus reaping the fruit of unalloyed literary enjoyment *(Rasa).*

2.5.7 Sage Kanva

Kalidasa has delineated every character in the drama *Abhijnanasakuntalam,* to the utmost perfection, keeping the propriety of the whole work in view. One of the main characters is

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Kanva, the foster-father of the heroine Sakuntala. He is depicted as a *Kulapati* running a vast hermitage, with thousands of disciples living there, engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. Kanva is spiritual to the core and his administrative abilities are immense. He is described as being possessed of superhuman power, the result of his ripened asceticism. Kalidasa has depicted Kanva as the perfect picture of the ancient sage-patriarch. This is strikingly represented in the incidents of the fourth act.

The principal trait of his character, as painted there, is his parental affection for his adopted daughter Sakuntala. Though he himself is an old hermit, he is so deeply affected by this feeling for his daughter, that he is moved to tears on the occasion of his separation from her. While bidding farewell to her, he is overcome with a deep sense of sorrow at her departure, as he has brought her up with utmost care and affection. Secondly, in spite of being a sage, who is detached from worldly activities, his worldly wisdom is remarkable. He demonstrates practical wisdom in the counsel he gives to Sakuntala and in the message he sends to the king. He is an affectionate father, a great sage, and a sound philosopher with a thorough understanding of human life.

On one hand, he is a great sage maintaining eternal celibacy and running a hermitage where many people are engaged in various rituals and spiritual activities. On the other hand, he is the one who, finding a baby at the foot of a tree in the jungle, brings it to the hermitage and gives the child a home, albeit an ascetic one. He took special care in bringing up the child with love and affection. He worries for a suitable groom for her, like any worldly lather. Even in the case of Anasuya and Priyamvada, he is aware of his responsibilities about arranging for their marriage. This apart, the advice he gives to Sakuntala in the fourth act and the message for Duhsanta, reveal the worldly wisdom of Kanva - political, social, cultural, and domestic. The role of a queen, the importance of an heir, the jealousies amongst the co-wives, the power of the sages, the limitations of the bride's father: there seems to be nothing that escapes the worldly eyes of sage Kanva. It is true that according to Indian mythological tradition, the sages had knowledge of the past and the future. Yet Kalidasa has juxtaposed the ethereal vision of Kanva with his worldly duties in such a natural development of incidents that the sage Kanva retains his worldly reactions, to lend that much-needed poignancy to the element of sorrow in the fourth act.

2.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. The cultural universe depicted in the play *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is opposed to the modern/twentieth century culture in many ways. Discuss.

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2. Discuss King Duhsanta in the play.
3. Woud you agree that Sakuntala is the depiction of the ideal Indian woman?
4. Write a note on Anasuya and Priyamvada.
5. Comment on the importance of any one of the following incidents in the play, such as; (a) Rishi Durvasa's curse; (b) The royal ring; (c) The title of the play; (d) The bee-episode; (e) Queen Hamsavati's Song; (f) The king's painting of Sakuntala

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit-III

SILAPPADHIKARAM

ILANGO ADIGAL

Shriya Pandey

STRUCTURE

Part-I

3.1 Learning Objectives
3.2 The Sangam Literature
3.3 The Story
3.4 The Oral Tradition
3.5 The Ritual Origin
3.6 The Epic Elements
3.7 The Poetics of Ilango

Part-II

3.8 THE CANTOS: Summary and Analysis
3.8.1 Canto XXIV: The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers
3.8.2 Canto XXV: The Choice of a Stone
3.8.3 Canto XXVI: Removing the Stone
3.8.4 Canto XXVII: The Lustration
3.8.5 Canto XXVIII: The Dedication of the Memorial Stone
3.8.6 Canto XXIX: The Benediction
3.8.7 Canto XXX: The Granting of a Favor
3.8.8 Epilogue

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Part-I
General Introduction

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

a. *Silappadhikaram* and the Sangam Literature
b. *Silappadhikaram* – the Story
c. *Silappadhikaram* and the Oral Tradition.
d. *Silappadhikaram* and the Ritual Origin of the Poem.
e. *Silappadhikaram* and the genre of the epic and its elements.
f. *Silappadhikaram* and the Poetics of Ilango.

3.2 THE SANGAM LITERATURE

Silappadhikaram, or The Cilappatikaram: The Tale of an Anklet* belongs to the period in Indian Classical literature from the South of India that has been subdivided into three sections under the umbrella term of Sangam literature. The period of Sangam has been subsumed under the corpus of ancient with "4000 member-poets", middle around "3,500 poets" and old "with evidence of around 500 poets who contributed to its corpus". The extant corpus belongs to the third Sangam which flourished in the city of Maturai. *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekalai* are the twin epics attributed to the period of Sangam. *Silappadhikaram* or *The Cilappatikaram* is one of the five epics written by a Jaina ascetic Ilango Adigal. The other four epics considered major and written by various other writers from the period are *Manimekalai, Jeevakacintamani, Valayapathi and Kundalakesi*. In *Silappadhikaram* (2021) translated by R. Parthasarathy and edited by B. Mangalam, the Introduction mentions;

> Three distinct academies of *Sangams* are said to have flourished in ancient Tamil country. The first *Sangam,* according to tradition, had more than 4,000 poets as members and held sway for an equal number of years. The second *Sangam* with more than 3,500 poets reigned for a corresponding number of years. The works of both these *Sangams* are located in Madurai that flourished for nearly two thousand years with evidence of around 500 poets who contributed to its corpus. (pp. 1)

The grammatical treatise *Tolkappiyam* divides the period of Old Sangam into two collections of the *Eighteen greater texts* (Pathinen Melkanakku) which comprises of the work by 473 poets and has been devised into *Ettuthokai* (The eight anthologies) and *Pathupattu*

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(The ten long poems); and the *Eighteen lesser texts* (Pathinen Kilkankku). The text divisions are dealt within the capacity of phonetics (*Ezhuthadhikaram)*, morphology and syntax *(Choladhikaram)* and; phonetics and subject matter *(Poruladhikaram)*. The subject matter of Tamil Poetics as elaborated in *Tolkappiyam* has contributed in considerably adding to the ecocentric aesthetics, stylistics and polycultural understanding of the development of human emotions in the form of Thinai that is also recognized as landscapes and substitutes as an accessory for the portrayal of the internal (Akam) and the external (Puram). The corpus of Sangam literature in its various recension circulated in contemporary times was first edited by S.V. Damodaram Pillai (1832-1901) and U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942) et al, along with the efforts of discovering palm leaf manuscripts. According to the Introduction by B. Mangalam in the Worldview Critical Editions of the text (2021);

> *Tolkappiyam* (grammatical treatise by Tholkappiyar) locates the contents of the poetry in terms of *mutual* – the first theme which are place and time, of *karu* – the seed theme that indicates the relationship between human beings and the world, society at large and *uri* – the essential theme that reflects the various phases of love or war. Scholars like (A. K.) Ramanujan (1985) and (Kamil) Zvelebil (1974) have termed *mutual* – first elements, *karu* – native elements, and *uri* – human element… There are seven Thinais each in *Akam* and *Puram* but two of them in both the domains are considered inappropriate in depiction of poetry. Each of the thinais evokes a particular situation or phase and its corresponding markers. It is an exciting reading strategy to identify a thinai from the images interspersed in such a short lyric! (pp. 4)

According to S. Murali in an essay titled *Environmental Aesthetics Interpretation of Nature in "Akam" and "Puram" Poetry* (1998), "The life of a couple of lovers is given its setting in time and place *(mudal)*, its natural background *(karu)*, and then the details of their conduct *(uri)* are worked out…The poetic world of the Sangam poet is one of correspondences between time, place and human experience. A. K. Ramanujan, poet and scholar extraordinary, who has translated a number of these poems, observes, citing Saussure's [Ferdinand de Saussure was a linguist who considerably influenced Structuralism. A school of thought that flourished in the literary time period of 1950s and is associated with self-contained relational structure of language that is similar to Saussure's idea of signifier and signified.] view that every sign is a union of signifier and signified: "In the Tamil system of correspondences, a whole language of signs is created by relating the landscapes as signifiers to the *uri* or appropriate human feelings." (Poems of Love and War, Delhi: OUP, 1985. P. 241).

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Check Your Progress

1. Explain the Sangam period in Tamil classical literature.
2. What according to Tolkappiyam is the division of subject matter in Sangam works?
3. Write a short note on Thinais, Akam, and Puram.

3.3 THE STORY

Silappadhikaram as an epic is divided into Three Books. In *Silappadhikaram* (2021), Structure and Narrative from the Introduction B. Mangalam underlines that;

> The structure of *Silappadhikaram* indicates the vision of the epic. It delineates, the three major kingdoms of Tamil country. The epic depicts the landscape, prosperity, governance, accomplishments in music, dance, adherence to dharma, notions of justice and heroic valour at the battlefield, patronage to arts and religion, the dynamics of ruler-subject relationship, prevalence of little traditions and mainstream religious practices of the three kingdoms. These aspects are woven into the personal lives of Kannagi - Kovalan - Madhavi in a brilliant way and traditional poetic conventions are followed to bring home the synthesis amongst poetics, poetry, polity and individual lives. The epic is divided into three books to mirror the three kingdoms. The action takes place in the capital cities of the three kingdoms – Puhar (Chozha), Madurai (Pandiya) and Vanji (Chera). In all, there are 30 cantos. Book I, The Book of Puhar has 10 cantos, Book II, The Book of Madurai with 13 cantos is the longest, and Book III, The Book of Vanji with 7 cantos is the shortest. (pp. 11)

Silappadhikaram is a story of a man who abandons his chaste wife for a woman of unparalleled artistic caliber. The wife Kannagi and courtesan Madhavi are placed together as an antithesis. The sexual politics of women being materialistic in her endeavor to wade through life's difficulties is juxtaposed with the firmness and chastity of a goddess. Kovalan, the fulcrum of this tryst becomes the breach in conjugality and is unable to fulfill his dharma. Kannagi and Kovalan's marital life is ripe with the possibility of a new start when Kovalan decides to leave his love interest Madhavi behind by the end of Book 1. The book specifically deals with the beginning of a happy marital life of Kovalan and Kannagi. Madhavi's character is introduced as an intervention in the tale of blissful romance as a reason for Kovalan's downfall and death. It is in Book 2, where Kovalan and Kannagi's journey towards the city of

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Pantiya begins and they meet a woman ascetic Kavunti. The cantos in Book 2 are replete with various other incidents of premonition which bring out the epical elements of divine providence. Kannagi decides to sell her anklet and offers it to Kovalan, to get some money for relocating in her new home amongst the warmth of hill dwellers.

Kovalan is unsuccessful in selling the anklet to the merchant. Later on, the same merchant accuses Kovalan for being a miscreant who committed the crime of stealing Queen of Pantiya's anklet. In order to establish law, peace and decorum in the state, the king announces Kovalan's punishment. The justice is served through the decapitation of Kovalan. The news of her husband's death enrages Kannagi. She moves the court proving Kovalan's innocence by breaking the anklet filled with rubies and other precious gems, unlike the Queen's anklet made of pearls. Kannagi's speech against the ignorant king instills a sense of doubt in the people of the kingdom. The failure in adhering to the Dharma of the king along with participation of the people in framing an innocent man leads to the mass conflagration at Maturai. The tradition of the epic follows rigorously the Akam and Puram genre conviction and introduces the element of mystical in the text by exalting the Thinais to amplify the aesthetic and narratorial quality of the text. Further in the third book, the Chera king establishes himself and Kannagi as ideal in the realm of permanence.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain structure and form of Silappadhikaram.
2. Name the cities where the events of the epic occur?
3. Write a short note on Kannagi, Kovalan, and Madhavi.
4. What does Kannagi do in rage after Kovalan's death?
5. Explain the title in the context of the story.

3.4 The Oral Tradition

The Akam (Agam) and the Puram heavily draws from the oral tradition just like the Vedas. Moriz Winternitz a scholar who is well known for his contribution to Sanskrit texts in *A History of Indian Literature* (1996) has stated;

> In India, from the oldest times, up till the present day, the spoken word, not writing, has been the basis of the whole of the literary and scientific activity…Even modern poets do not desire to be read, but their wish is that

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> their poetry may become "an adornment for the throats of the experts". (pp. 33-34)

However, distanced be the euro centric understanding of the colonized by the masters we cannot deny the heterodox society characterized through the Book of Pukar. The oral tradition regards poetry as a way of knowledge as the word is believed to be instilled with a sense of sacred power. In oral culture the tradition is the sacrosanct and a fixed authorship is an alien concept as has also been furthered by Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*: *The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) are the three aspects of it are composition, transmission and performance;

> In oral culture, a text presupposes in its composition a shared knowledge between the bard and his audience. It is dependent on its context to help explicate its meaning. Text and context are therefore inseparable…For generations, bards (panans) have recited or sung the story of Kovalan throughout the Tamil country, embellishing it with myths. It was this story from the oral tradition that was at some point transcribed by a learned poet (pulavan). Therefore, both the oral and written versions freely circulated, each drawing upon the other…The term "oral residue" proposed by Ong as a useful tool for investigating a text's orality. Ong defines it as "habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice, or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture, or indicating a reluctance or inability to disassociate the written medium from the spoken." (pp. 59)

The etymological tracing of the name Kovalan and Kannagi gives us an insight into the element of oral residue better as scholars are of the opinion that the name Kovalan derives from the Sanskrit Gopalaka "a guardian of the cow" and Kannagi means one that has beautiful eyes. The provenance of oral folktales in the text also helps us in understanding the location of residual in the text for example in Canto 15 when Brahman Matalan narrates a tale from the *Panchatantra.*

The *Thinai* drawing from such bardic lineage is characteristic in defining a particular sense through the landscape and location. As we are inducted into the poetic subject matter, we have to understand the stylistic-aesthetic of the text through the categorization and meaning of *Thinai*. According to the historian P. T. Srinivasa Iyenger on a similar line of thought as Mikhail Bakhtin, the oral is visible through the rightfully placed Thinai and use of old rhythmic akval meter (aciriyam) in the Tamil landscape as the regions described are

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congruent with the topography. A primary difference between the Akam (Agam) and the Puram thinai in terms of aesthetic stylistics is that while the Akam deals with only phases of love as mentioned in the Akam Thinais below, the Puram Thinais prominently associated with the motif of war.

THINAI	FLOWER/TREES	REGION	PHASES OF LOVE
Kurinci	Conehead	Hills	Clandestine Meeting of Lovers
Mullai	Jasmine	Pastures	Waiting in Hope
Marutam	Arjuna Tree	Country Side	Wife's sulking/ Infidelity of man
Neytal	Dark Lily	Seashore	Lamenting/Anxiety for husband's return
Palai	Ivory Wood	Wasteland	Parting/ Lover's departure in search of wealth or knowledge
Kaikkilai	Not Specified	Not Specified	Unrequited Love
Perunthinai	Not Specified	Not Specified	Mismatched Love/Lust

Mangalam, B. "Context and Concerns". *Silappadhikaram*, Worldview Critical Editions, 2015.

Thinai six and seven in Akam domain are named as Kaikkilai – unrequited love, and Perunthinai – mismatched love or lust are not considered proper for describing distinctive characteristics. The other five thinais in the Akam are termed as Aintinai.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the five main Thinais for portrayal of the internal (Akam)? Explain.

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3.5 THE RITUAL ORIGIN

According to R. Parthasarathy in the postscript of the Penguin edition of the text *The Cilappatikaram* (2004) stands as a separate stream of thought in understanding the diversity of epistemological origins in ancient India and is non-Sanskritic in nature. *Tolkappiyam* is a grammatical treatise which exposits the various aspects of the works of the Sangam with respect to Tamil grammar and poetics. Ullurai Uvamam or "indirect suggestions" is a literary device of Akam in which only the object of comparison is explicitly and interpreter is offered minimal cues to translate a subjective understanding of protagonist and the subject matter of the poetry. The Puram deals with the external which is explicit in its reductive and expansive overlapping of uri or the human element in the text. Akam and Puram in the understanding of Sangam literature means the internal and the external. But both in Akam and Puram the subsumed landscape is of private and public space of activity, agency and ethics.

The external which is the Puram deals with the motif of war and subsequent manifestation of emotions that are associated with the feeling of victory, community, accession and personal virtues. The internal has been termed as Akam and deals with the emotions of love, hearth and the introspective idea of morality as seen in the city of Vanci, Maturai and Pukar, through Kannagi. The idea of mortality and immortality in sectarian sense is common in both Akam and Puram and subsequently adds to the epic elements of the text. A predominantly feminine voice which also is contributing to the scholarly arguments of women being central to the Akam and men being relegated to the space of Puram for their inability to understand the intricacies of human bond. The masculine prowess recognizes the need for apotheosis of Kannagi which is glorified through the insertion of Gajabahu as audience in the Book of Vanci Canto XXX in *The Cilappatikaram* (2004).

R. Parthasarathy is of the view that, "*The Book of Vanci* emphasize the ritual underpinnings of the poem and the intimate relationship in Tamil society between the king and the goddess. By installing the stone for the heroic Kannagi, Cenkuttuvan confirms the place as sacred. By entering this sacred place, he is able to share in the goddess' power. He thus institutionalizes the cult of the goddess. Simultaneously, he installs himself as a universal emperor (*chakravartin*) who enjoys the protection of the goddess. The Greeks also has a cult of stones. At Delphi, which they believed to be the exact center or navel (*omphalos*) of the earth, there was a beehive shaped stone that was sacred to Apollo. The city was famous for its oracle, which figured prominently in myths. Mircea Elidae (*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1949, pp. 233) reports that "the *omphalos*, in every tradition, is a stone consecrated by a superhuman presence…. [It] bears witness of something,

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and it is from that witness that it gets its value, or its position in the cult." (p.292). In the *Puram* domain;

THINAI	FLOWER/TREE	SITUATION
Vetci	Scarlet Ixora	Cattle Raiding
Vanci	Indian Willow	Invasion
Ulinai	Balloon Vine	Siege
Thumpai	White Dead Nettle	Pitched Battle
Vakai	Sirissa Tree	Victory
Kanci	Portia Tree	Impermanence of Life
Patan	Not specified	Praise of Kings

Mangalam, B. "Context and Concerns". *Silappadhikaram,* Worldview Critical Editions, 2015.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the seven Thinais used for the portrayal of the external (Puram).

3.6 THE EPIC ELEMENTS

The epic elements of the text are incorporated in the beginning in the form of a verse as poetic homage to the sun, moon, rain and the city of Pukar. The subject matter of poetry for a great narrative poem has four ends and as devised in *Tantiyalankaram*, and mentioned in the Postscript of *The Cilappatikaram* (2004);

> A great narrative poem should begin with one or more of the three elements: a song in praise of God, invocation, and an introduction to the subject. The four ends of humans should form its content. It should have a hero of incomparable greatness. It should contain descriptions of mountains, the sea, land, city, the six seasons and sic parts of the day, sunrise and moonrise. It should further describe the consummation of marriage, a coronation, the enjoyment of gardens and water sports, pleasures of intoxication, the bearing of children, lovers' quarrels, and sexual love. The state council (with the king and his ministers), diplomatic missions, invasions, battles, and victories should be a part of it. It should be divided into chapters called *carukkam*, *ilampakam*, or

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> *pariccelam* (cantos). Ripe with mood and emotions, it should please, and be the work of a learned man. (Parthasarathy, R. pp 302-3)

The consummation of marriage and the liaison between a courtesan and the male protagonist have an erotic sentiment attached to it for verbalizing the setting and the actions. Though scholars are of the opinion *Silappadhikaram* does not abide by the rules of rasal dhvani as espoused in Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra.* B. Mangalam in the 'Context and Concern' of *Silappadhikaram* (2015) sheds light to the epic elements of the text;

> The idea of threefold Tamil – poetry, music and dance – operates in Tamil epics. They are, therefore, referred to as *muttamil kappiyam.* The form of Ilango's *Silappadhikaram* follows what could be termed a poetic sequence that incorporates *Iyal* (poetry), *Isai* (music) and *Natakam* (dance) and is interspersed with prose sections. It is thus a unique, distinctly non- Sanskritic form of poetic composition. Its indigenous structure and narratorial style are evidently different from western classical epics. The term epic, in the context of *Silappadhikaram,* is a useful critical nomenclature but each time applied with an awareness of the inherent differences with its western and Sanskritic counterparts. Tamil critical tradition has termed such works as *Silappadhikaram* as *iyal-isal-nataka-porul-todar-nilai-ceyyul. Todarnilaiceyyul* implies a long poetic composition with internal coherence and sequentiality. *Silappadhikaram* in Tamil consists 5, 730 lines in *akval* meter and is conjectured to be composed around fifth century C.E…along with *akval,* the other meters used in this epic are *kali* and *Venpa*. (p.9)

The character of Kannagi weaves the epic elements of *Silappadhikaram* together. She in her generosity and enormity is a woman exalted for her simplicity and righteousness by Ilango. She becomes the Dharma and is pivotal in establishing the heroic through her power to end injustice. The 'Postscript' of *The Cilappatikaram* (2015) defines the characterization of protagonists in the epic as;

> Kovalan and Kannagi are depicted as idealized types rather than as individuals. This is in keeping with the conventions of the great narrative poem which stipulates heroes and heroines of incomparable greatness. They are expected to live according to their dharma and are therefore, not free to act on their own. Their actions are predestined, and reflect little or no freedom of choice. Indeed, we sense a foreboding of tragedy in Kovalan's description. (pp. 394)

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The *Tirukkural* describes the four ends of the life as duty, wealth, desire and liberation. The text deals with only three of these four ends and its predecessor *Manimekalai* deals with the fourth end which is the idea of liberation along with duty.

The protagonist of *Silappadhikaram* Kovalan and Kannagi have met with an idealized depiction in the text and living in adherence to their duty. The fall of Kovalan in the form of extramarital affair is a suffix to his story of previous birth where he had killed an innocent merchant named Cankaman. Further the role of an unjust king further exemplifies on the idea of clash between duty and desire which results in the conflagration which provides a liminal space towards the idea of moral and virtue, for example, Canto XX. *The Cilappatikaram* (2015), translated by R. Parthasarathy in its Introduction highlights the distinctive features of the epic;

> In the Sanskrit and Greek epics, the action is centered around events in the court and culminates in a great war. The action in Tamil epic is focused on events in the life of two ordinary people from the influential merchant class that rose to prominence in the centuries following the end of the Mauryan empire, events that ultimately bring the protagonists into conflict with the Pantiya King. War, therefore, is not central to the Tamil epic as it is to the Sanskrit and Greek. (pp. 8)

The positing of location in accordance with the experience reflected through the characters is an important element of a great narrative poem as seen through the elaborate picturesque description of Pukar, Maturai and Vanci, "The descriptions of Pukar, Maturai, and Vanci in *The Cilappatikaram* are utopian". (pp. 305)

Check Your Progress

1. Write a brief note on the epic elements in Silappadhikaram.

3.7 THE POETICS OF ILANGO

The national imagination of India to an extent in mythopoeic as has been established through texts which have given an exemplary insight into the socio-cultural, historical and geopolitical location of the temporal and understanding of the Indian subcontinent. The myths at times are permeated with rituals and set the idea of ethics. The poetics of Ilango as employed in the text is visible through the employment of two kinds of love Kalavu (premarital & marital) and Karpu (extramarital). A text titled *Akapporul* or The Meaning of Love divides premarital love under the category of Thinais and marital love is further

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exposited in the form of "Prital" which illuminates the causes of separation of a husband from his wife;

> (1) search for knowledge; (2) the pursuit of wealth; (3) the service of the king; (4) the protection of the land; (5) the appeasement of enemies; and (6) consorting with harlots. (Parthasarathy, R, pp 288)

"Parattai" or harlots have been defined to be of three types which are courtesans (*katarparattaiyar*), concubines (*irparattaiyar*) and whores (*ceriparattaiyar*). Concubines were accepted in wealthy families as wife while the whores and the courtesans were public in their visibility and had clientele to appease with their vast repository of knowledge through performance of art. The only demarcation between the two is through the character of Madhavi who is explicit in her performance of art unlike Kannagi but Madhavi has the freedom of choice to select her subject of interest to experience the bliss of conjugality as a courtesan which will never interfere with the virtuous private domain of the male protagonist, for example, Canto VII.

The illegitimacy of the romance between Kovalan and Madhavi is well established through the renouncement of the later by the former on the grounds of chastity. Ilango uses the tradition of Akam to depict the indirect in his poetry, as seen in the course of Book 1, The Book of Pukar that hints on the unnatural condition which has disturbed the order of being through the use of four of seven Akam Thinais. Mullai, which means the patience of the woman waiting for her lover; Marutam signifies the infidelity of lovers; Neytal is used to show the fear of separation and Palai which the elopement of lovers away from the family. The earth is compared to the pain of the female protagonist Kannagi who is separated from her lover and marks an important foreshadowing of apotheosis of Kannagi in reference to Tevi or mother goddess earth that will be the source of birth and vessel for the dead. The Postscript of *The Cilappatikaram* (2015) brings into view an important aspect of the female protagonist Kannagi forth the readers';

> *The Cilappatikaram*, it may be noted, contains the earliest record in the Indian Tradition of the apotheosis of a woman not of the brahaman or ksatriya, but of the vaisya, class – a woman of the people, exalted to the pantheon not for any heroic deed but simply for being a chaste wife. (pp. 305)

Ilango also follows the tradition of Puram in his limning of heroic in the epic. The narrative is permeated with six of the seven Puram Thinais as expressed in the third Book of the text, The Book of Vanci. Vanci, is the preparation of war to take over enemies' land; Ulinai signifies process towards victory through siege; Tumpai is the battle waged against the enemy; Vakai

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is celebration of victory; Kanci is a prelude to impermanence of life and the last Thinai Patan is the glorification of warrior's mettle in the adversity as exemplary;

> Invasions, battles and victories. King Cenkuttuvan's expedition to the Himalaya and his defeat of northern kings such as Kanaka and Vijaya form the subject of canto 26 (Removing the stone). There are vivid battle scenes that follow the conventions of the heroic genre…heroism is the mood of "The Book of Vanci." (pp. 306)

The Tamil idea of Kingship, The Ritual origin of the poem and The Jaina background in this context is important to illuminate on the context of various subject matter of poetry established through uri or the human element. According to the Post script of the text by R. Parthasarathy the Tamil idea of kingship is based on an ideal king which shares the moral uprightness of *The Ramayana* but differentiates itself from the Homeric agency of humane which is interspersed with faultiness in the moral virtuousness of the warriors. The Kappalar or the protector is as close to his subjects as he is to the cosmos which can be witnessed in Ceral King's victory as a righteous King. *The Cilappatikaram* (2004) in its Post Script delineates the attributes of Tamil idea of kingship;

> The Cola King is an exemplary ruler…The Pantiya king bypasses the law; he has Kovalan executed without a trial in his anxiety to be reconciled to the queen who at the moment feigns a quarrel with him. The King's rashness costs him his life, and Maturai itself goes up in flames. (pp. 541)

The king Cenkuttuvan also establishes himself as a king through the royal sacrifice and dedicating the memorial stone for the goddess Pattini. R. Parthasarathy notes that "early Tamil kings used Vedic sacrifices to confirm their sovereignty". The ethnocentric king is devoutly assuring the three of the four human ends of wealth, desire and duty are performed "king's conduct in the terms of the ripening of his Karma" and moving towards the fourth liberation. The fire becomes an important element in restoration of Dharma and establishing the supreme authority that watches over the subject with the blessing of widow Kannaki who has been liberated through deification;

> The symbol of Kannaki has pulled together the different strands, religious, social, and political, in the Tamil cultural experience…the Tamils identify chastity with female spirituality. Kannaki embodies this best in the Tamil tradition. Her chastity empowers her to dispense (niti): she humbles the Pantiya king and burns down Maturai. Her spiritual authority thus supersedes the purely temporal one of the king; notwithstanding the gender and class differences between subject and ruler…Though Kannaki passed into the

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> heavens, her spiritual presence remains on the earth. Her apotheosis invests her with power and dominion in heaven and on earth. As the goddess Pattini, she can now perpetually intercede on behalf of her followers…the Tamil poem deals with the ascent of a human (Kannaki) to divinity. The heterodox religions, Buddhism and Jainism, emphasized a human being's innate ability to obtain salvation on his or her own. (pp. 330)

Interestingly understanding the Jaina background of the poet Ilango who has been given the honorific of Atikal which means an ascetic belonging to the Jaina sect gives a better insight and preliminary understanding of the ritual origin of the poem;

> Kannaki's apotheosis is foretold by the goddess Maturapati in Canto 23 where she explains to her the circumstances surrounding Kovalan's unexpected death…the goddess attributes Kovalan's death to its karma again a law that Jainas developed further than either the Hindus or Buddhists…The Jaina nun Kavunti starves herself to death on hearing of Kovalan and Kannaki's fate…By the time of the poem, Indra had ceased to be an important god in the Hindu pantheon. He had become, on the other hand, the foremost god of the Jainas and Buddhists…Ilanko introduces the Jaina doctrine of Karma as a structural element in the narrative…The law of Karma functions as a dominant motif in the poem. (Parthasarathy, R, pp. 327-336)

Silappadhikaram deals with the idea of spiritual which originates from Jaina understanding of Karma along with the superhuman element instilled through the figure of justice who dispenses the authority through the king of Ceral who aptheosises the cult of Goddess Pattini. According to Gananath Obeyesekere the Cult of Goddess Pattini has lost its prominence in the Southern India or has been subsumed under the folds of Hinduism but the idea of mother goddess is still deep rooted in the tradition of Sri Lankan Buddhists and the Hindus. Though he gives evidenced arguments regarding the survival of cult in Kerala and Sri Lanka but much has been lost of its practice in Tamil Nadu, "It is believed that the Kali-Bhagavati temple in Kotunkolur, Cranganore district Kerala was originally a Pattini shrine…Pattini, as Obeyesekere reminds us, is the only goddess in Indian mythology with one breast…A genre in Malayalam folk songs, the torram pattu, "the song of origin," tells the story of Kovalan and Kannagi." (pp. 331).

Check Your Progress

1. What are the four ends of 'human' and how does it influence the epic?

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THE SILAPPADHIKARAM: THE TALE OF AN ANKLET ILANGO ADIGAL

Part-II

The Book of Vanci

Shriya Pandey

3.8 THE CANTOS: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

3.8.1 Canto XXIV: The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers

The Canto has 26 stanzas and is divided into two parts, the first part is a celebration of Kannagi who is elevated to the status of Goddess Pattini/Pathini, and the second part is a song being sung by the hill dwellers which is a conversation between two friends. The first stanza (lines 1-29) starts with Hill Dwellers dancing and singing about meeting Kannagi who did not have her left breast, when they had come to "play in the waterfalls, to plunge in the springs". According to *Ethnomusicology and India* (1968), "A study of the music of the Indian tribes will bear it out…Their music is still culture-based. They have different sets of songs and dance for different gods, festivals and ceremonies. Some of them have also special songs and dance for wedding, harvesting and other important agricultural work. Hunting songs and dances are also quite common among some tribes in India…They have different songs for different festivals and ceremonies, but have only two types of dance, namely, *kol-kali* (stick dance) and *vatta-kali* (dancing in a circle without sticks)[1]" (p.11). The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers is a form of *Vatta-Kali*.

Kannagi told these women about the fall of the city of Madurai. The story is as follows, Kovalan and Kannagi were happily married in the city of Puhar. Later, Kovalan left Kannagi for courtesan Madhavi. In Canto IX, it is revealed by Tevanti to Kannagi, that her husband left her because of the vow Kannagi failed to keep in her previous birth and Kannagi needs to bathe in the seaside grove of river Kaveri and worship at the temple of Kama to restore her home. Kannagi tells Tevanti about an ominous dream, in which, misfortune fell upon Kovalan and a kingdom. Kovalan returns to Kannagi as Madhavi is merely a dancing girl.

[1] "They perform stick dance at the time of marriage, while on other occasions they have *vatta-kali.*"
B, Sudhibhushan. *Ethnomusicology and India*. Calcutta, Indian Publications, 1968.

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Kovalan tells Kannagi that he has lost his wealth. Kannagi offers him her anklet, to sell. Kovalan asks Kannagi to leave with him for the city of Madurai. Kannagi and Kovalan leave for the city of Madurai and on Kavunti's suggestion live under cowherdess Matari's care.

In Book 3 Kovalan goes to the city of Madurai to sell Kannagi's anklet and shows it to a goldsmith. The Queen of Pantiya's anklet had recently been stolen and due to the beauty of Kannagi's anklet it is mistook to be queen's anklet. Kovalan is framed as a thief at the court of Pantiyan king and is executed. Kannagi after receiving the news of her husband's death goes to the court to seek justice. It is proven by Kannagi in front of the king that Kovalan was innocent by breaking apart her anklet that is filled with gems, while, the queen's anklet is filled with pearls. The Gods reveal to Kannagi that Kovalan's death is a result of his past Karma. In her grief, Kannagi tears apart her left breast and throws it on the street of Maturai. In order to, restore the order of things the Gods intervene and Maturai in engulfed in flames. When the hill dwellers heard of Kannagi's valour and grief they were awestruck by her. They bow down to Kannagi even the gods rained flowers over her;

> O People
> Of small huts! Sound the great drum,
> Sound the little drum, blow the horn,
> Ring the loud bell, sing the Kurinci raga,
> Offer strong incense, and rain flowers
> In honour of this woman who has lost a breast
> So that our mountains are forever blessed with plenty. (Trans. Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 211)[2]

The lines 13-19 of the text bring out the oral residue in its vivacity. The oral part of the prayer mentions drum, horn, ring and the *Kurinci* raga is a part of the hill dweller's performance as dance and music, for example, *Kondunilai* and *Kuravai,* are ancient in their appearance and also lost to us in the bardic translation. It is of import to note that, it is the hill dwellers, who foremost revere Kannagi as Tevi or the mother nature. She signifies fertility and plentitude.

The 2nd-26th stanza is the 4th song cycle of the epic. The other 3 song cycles are a part of Book 1 and 2; 'The Love Songs of the Seaside Grove', 'The Songs and Dance of the Hunters', 'The Round Dance of the Heardswomen', and the 5th song cycle is 'The

[2] The cantos cited have been translated by R. Parthasarathy.
Adigal, Ilango. *The Cilappatikaram* trans. R. Parthasarathy. New York, Columbia University Press, 1993. First Published in India 2004, Penguins Book India.

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Benediction' in Book 3. The 4th song cycle 'The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers' is a song being sung by the hill dwellers. The theme of the song is a conversation between two friends. This song marks the transition from the elements of *Akam/Agam* thinai to the *Puram* thinai in the third book of the epic. It is In the canto the *Agam* thinai used is the Kurinci thinai which signifies clandestine meeting of lovers. Thinais in the epic provides it an element of rapid succession of changes in the geographical location and a series of emotions tending toward a particular end. The song begins, the first friend tries to cheer up the second friend, who is waiting for her lover.

The Canto smoothly moves from the subject of *Agam* to *Puram*, and this is done as the situation of second friend waiting for her lover is interspersed with oral history of war and ascension. Stanza 2-14 is the first friend asking her friend who is waiting for her lover to "Let us bathe, friend! Let us bathe!". She also sings the praise of the "lord of the eternal hills— / Centil, Cenkotu, Venkunru and Krakam—", "of the lord riding a peacock" who was nursed by 6 mothers and brought down "The Kuruku mountain". Stanza 15-18 is the second friend's reply is measurable. As, she disagrees with the friend and does not believe her love to be a "sickness". She says;

> Good woman with arms ringed with bangles!
> This makes me laugh: if the son of our lord
> Who drank poison and sat under the banyan tree
> Comes here, he is a bigger fool shaman
> Who comes to rid me of the illness caused
> By the man from the mountain of strong fragrance. (Trans. Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 214)

Stanza 15-26 is again the first friend speaking to her second friend and recounts meeting the man from the mountain in stanza 19-20. She says;

> When he heard what I told him of the gossip
> In our village, he left with a broken heart. ((Trans. Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 216)

The first friend sings the praise of Kannagi as beautiful as Valli the consort of Lord Muruggan, and continues to tell the story of Kannagi's apotheosis. She glorifies her chastity and love for her husband and prays for Goddess Pattini's blessings. The song cycle ends with orally passing the history of Chera's victory over the northern kings with a reference to their emblem of bow-arrow.

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In an article titled *Onranpakuti- a 'Single part' of the Tamil Epic Cilappatikaram and its significance to the study of South Indian Vaisnavism* (2014), Lynn Ate mentions that the word means a part of the singular. The Kurinci raga mentioned by the hill dwellers unlike the Tamil metric feet which has one, two or three metrical units, uses the three metrical units and has a four-beat rhythm. It is also similar to the hunter's song in the text. The dance has been interpreted by the medieval commentaries of Bhakti saints who were influenced by the Vaishnava school of thought. The voices of women in conversation with each other, engage in the stylistics of *Agam* thinais, such as, Mullai (Phase of love: Waiting), Marutam (Phase of love: Sulking), along with, *Puram* thinais, such as, Kaanji (Combat Situation: Transience of Life) and Padaan (Combat Situation: Praise of Kings).

The dancing hill maidens honour Gods and Chera King. The song cycle sung as a conversation between friends apotheosises the new deity who is Kannagi, the goddess of chastity.[3]

Check Your Progress

1. Who narrates the story of Kannagi's apotheosis?
   a Hill Dwellers-Kuravas
   b. Hill Dwellers- Kavunti
   c. Hill Dwellers- Maravan
   d. Hill Dwellers
2. Write a short note the 'The Round Dance of the Hill Dwellers'.
3. Write a short note on Thinais used in the Canto.
4. Which thinai is used in the Canto?
   a. Agam-Puram
   b. Puram
   c. Agam
   d. None of the above

[3] The definitions of thinai has been taken from Worldview Critical editions, Translated by R. Parthasarathy and edited by B. Mangalam.
Adigal, Ilango. *Silappadhikaram* trans. R. Parthasarathy. Delhi, Bookland Publishing Co., 2021.

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3.8.2 Canto XXV: The Choice of a Stone

The Canto has 202 lines. Lines 1-21, is a description of Chera King, "Cenkuttuvan", who is illustrious and carved a bow emblem on the Himalaya and queen, "Ilanko Venmal". The King and queen, decide to go the mountains "where the groves were thick/ With clouds and the waterfalls leaped with the roar". The *Puram* thinai used here is Padaan (Combat situation: Praise of Kings). The leave from Vanci and travel for 1260 miles with their royal attendants, to reach the fine sand dunes of the Periyar river. Lines 22-29, narrates the beauty of the fine sand dunes;

> Fully opened flowers from the cottonwood, kino,
> The laburnum in clusters, gamboge, redwood,
> And fragrant sandalwood, Swarms of bees

And insects hovered over them. Here he stopped. (Parthasarathy, 1993, pp. 219-220) Lines 30-59, is a shift in scene. The dancing hill dwellers appear before the Chera King and sing the *vallai* song. They have accepted the sovereignty of Chera king, the *Puram* thinais Vetchi and Ulinai is an appraisal of the relationship between hill dwellers and Chera King. The hills dwellers peacefully offer the king the tribute and celebrate his arrival[4];

> The hill dwellers came before him. They carried
> Of elephants, piles of Englewood, whisks
> Of deer hair, pots pf honey, sticks
> Of sandalwood, lumps of sindura, Kohl
> And orpiment, stalks of cardamom and pepper,
> Coconuts, ripe mangos, wreaths of green leaves,
> Jackfruits, garlic, sugarcane, flowering creepers,
> Clusters of areca nuts from rich palms,
> Bunches of sweet plantains, cubs of lion

[4] In Book 2, Kannagi and Kovalan are left in the care of Matari by Jaina ascetic Kavunti, of the Hills' people, a cowheardess. They crossed "Uraiyar" to reach the city of Maturai. Also, the first witness of Kannagi after the breast has been wrenched off her chest by her are the hill people. According to *Role of Peasants in the Early History of Tamilakam* (1988), "Of these the *Marutam* regions were the fertile agricultural tracts along the fertile river valleys with prosperous villages known as *Ur* inhabited by peas called *Ulavar*, *Vellalar* etc. in literature. The terms *Ulavar* literally means ploughmen and the term *Vellalar* literally means masters of the soil indicating possession of land rather than work on other's land for wages".

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> And tiger, baby elephants, young monkeys,
> Small bears, mountain hinds, fawns,
> The young of deer, musk deer, harmless mongooses,
> Peacocks with brilliant feathers, civet cats,
> Wild hens, and sweet-talking parrots. (Parthasarathy, 1993, pp. 220-221)

The Hill Dwellers are not just the medium of retaining and disseminating the history of battles and birth stories of deities, but, their acceptance of Chera King as their sovereign also speaks for the polity of ancient Tamil Kingship and memory of territory. The songs and dance are an important part of the culture of Hill dwellers which is a history of their own identity being performed and codified. In the article *Three Perspectives on Music and the Idea of Tribe in India* (2001) Richard Kent Wolf posits;

> Indira Peterson similarly argues that in the later Sangam "Cilappatikaram... the differences in form, purpose and aesthetic between the urban-courtly and rural/communal/folk [and tribal is part of this half of the dichotomy] art does not seem to be based on major distinctions in cultural consciousness between people of the two social groupings" (Peterson 1998, 49). These differences in consciousness emerged in part, she suggests, in the 18'h century under the impact of migrations and political changes of the preceding two centuries. The dramatic art that Peterson uses to discuss these changes, the Kuravanci dance drama, is an excellent example of "popular representation" of tribe and related social categories. (Wolf, 2001, p. 31)

Lines 60-94 are addressed to the Chera King. The speaker of lines 60-68 are Hill dwellers. They say that they have been king's "vassals" which means feudal tenant for seven generations and pray for his lineage's long rule. Lines 69-94 are spoken by the famed Tamil poet "Cattan" who narrates the story of Kannagi and her apotheosis to Chera King Cenkuttuvan/Senguttuvan. On hearing of the injustice of Pantiyan[5] ruler the Chera king in lines 95-106 describes the dharma or duty of a king;

[5] It may be gathered that before the time of Alexander, the Tamil states, comprising some of the earliest racial elements in India, had been organized under a dynasty that had originated in northern, that is Aryan, India, and that in all probability established itself in Southern India as the result of a naval attack and invasion. This dynasty had first borne the name of Pandya, and it claimed descent from Pandu, the father of the Pandava brothers, the heroes of the war re- counted in the Mahabharata. Several references in Greek literature speak in this connection. Arrian (Indika, VIII) derives the dynasty from Pandaea, "only daughter of Heracles among many sons. The land where she was born and over which she ruled was named Pandaea after her".

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By crowned kings the Pantiyan lies condemned.
And before the news reached our ears, it is well
He gave up his life. Now the king's death has made
The scepter upright, bent by the inexorable hand
Of Fate. When the rains fail, disaster strikes.
If men suffer injustice, fear grips the land.
To forswear tyranny and ensure the welfare
Of his subjects is the king's duty. Born
Of a noble line, suffering is his lot. His throne
Is not to be envied. (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 222)

The above lines highlights three important domains of *Puran*, Pitched Battle (Tumbai Thinai), Victory (Vaagai Thinai) and Transience of life (Kaanji Thinai). The notion of pitched battle in this context is unseeable, until we look at the political division of territory between the Chera, Chola and Pantiya. The Chola King Karikala was the grandfather of Chera King Cenkuttukan. The Pantiya kingdom is said to have been established by the Greeks (Check footnote 4) though it is debatable. Yet, in Book 1: The Chapter of Puhar, we see there are some lines which may also suggest the influx of Christianity given that it was a port town and flourished on trade "Cankam poetry us generally thought to stem from the first two centuries of the christian era" (Yocum, 1973, p.8), for example, Canto IX[6] recounts Tevanti;

Taking the Child in her arms, she entered[7]
The temple of the wishing tree of the immortals,
The temple of the white elephant, the temple
Of the beautiful white god, the temple
Of the sun, lord of the meridian, who comes…(Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 88)

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Schoff, Wilfred H. "Tamil Political Divisions in the First Two Centuries of the Christian Era." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 33, 1913, pp. 209–13. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/592826.

[6] According to the 'Postscript' in *The Cilappatikaram* (Translated by R. Parthasarathy), 1993; the work was discovered by U.V. Caminataiyar (b. 1855) and was first published in 1872.

[7] Tevanti's marriage to Lord Cattan, the dream sequences, intervention by Gods, divine visions, all of this constitute the Epic elements of *The Cilappatikaram.*

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The fall of Pantiyan and the victory of Chera is then also an establishment of new realm of rule. The context of transient life, which is an important binding theme in the epic can be understood in two ways, the first is the philosophy justifies the rule of king as a divine sanction, the second is to establish Dharma or duty.

The Philosophy of transience of life as employed in the epic justifies the rule of the king. Human Civilization and social progress go hand in hand. The ancient societies were shifting from the migratory hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a more settled agrarian lifestyle in India. As the communities formed, so did the need for constant change in governing system to meet the needs of people, such as financial, food, security, et al. The combination of physical power, warfare technique, material wealth, the rule became hereditary. As, the moral and patriotic judgements began to shape up the office of the kings the supremacy of divine became paramount to maintain the order within the cosmic cycle of life. Archaeology has documented ritualistic behaviors in the Middle Paleolithic era, but worship has always been a part of civilizations. In ancient Tamil society, Glenn E. Yocum's article *Shrines, Shamanism, and Love Poetry*: *Elements in the Emergence of Popular Tamil Bhakti* (1973) highlights;

> The focus on sacred places in early Tamil religion is amply confirmed in Cankam literature. There is some evidence that certain places originally derived their sacredness from a tree or stone which was considered to embody sacred power. Although it is a matter of speculation why particular locations originally came to be thought of as holy, it is clear that by Cankam times, i.e., by the beginning of the Christian Era, shrines associated with particular deities were flourishing in South India. (Yocum, 1973, p.8)

Hence, the canto in using *Puram* thinai Kaanji (Transience of Life) justifies the rule of the king by establishing his moral superiority as a component of rational motive which is dictated by good sense given to him by the Gods. The idea of Dharma or Duty is an outgrowth of association of sacredness with value system of governance in ancient Tamil. Fate and justice, in the epic also defined according to the divine realm of omnipresent and omniscient providence.

Lines 107-117 are a conversation between the Chera king and queen. The king asks the queen who is the better of the two women, the first woman being Kannagi who sacrificed her life to prove Kovalan's innocence and the second Pantiyan queen who died of grief after hearing the news of her husband's death.The Chera queen replied that the Pantiyan queen should be blessed with the joys of heaven, but it is Kannagi who should be revered and honored. The reply of Chera queen is pivotal in understanding the social markers of the diplomatic conduct in a particular situation.

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Lines 118-144, uses *Puram* Thinai Tumbai (Combat situation: Pitched Battle). It starts as a conversation between the King and his councillors, the councillors suggest a stone should be brought from the Himalayas to engrave the image of Goddess Pattini. The King replies that he agrees with the councillors and if the King of mountains will refuse him the stone he will wage a war against them. Lines 145-179, is the preparation for war and uses the *Puram* Thinai Vaanji, Villain Kotai minister of the King asks a message to be sent to the kings of north sealed with the emblem of bow, fish and tiger[8]. In Lines 180-202, another minister Alumpilvel suggests that instead of sending a message to the northern kings, it should be announced in the city with drumbeats and the spies of northern king who live in the outskirts of Maturai will send the message, the message is as follows;

> May our gracious king live forever! May he protect
> The world from one age to the next. Our king
> Marches north to get a stone from the Himalaya
> Engraved with his bow-emblem. O kings
> Of the northern countries!Go forth and pay
> Him tribute. Remember the heroic acts
> Of our king who tore apart the Calamba oak
> From the sea, and engraved his bow-emblem
> On the forehead of the Himalaya. If you refuse
> To listen, leave your wives and become
> Hermits. May the army live forever,
> Dear as his own face to the king of victorious anklets (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 226)

According to "A Critical Commentary" B. Mangalam in *Silappadhikaram* (2021), the Canto XXV "ushers in the heroic domain with one of the puram thinais, *Vanji*. This thinai highlights preparation for the war and is first of the seven puram thinais with its accompanying thurai (theme), *Korravanji* indicating the praise of a king who destroys his

[8] Bow: Chera, Tiger: Chola, Fish: Pantiyan.

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enemies valiantly at the battlefield. The (Tamil) title of this canto *Kaatchi* indicates the first stage of the ritual pertaining to *nadukal*/memorial stone."[9] (p.220)

Check Your Progress

1. Write a short note on the Thinais used in the Canto.
2. Explain the title, *The Choice of Stone.*
3. Which Chera minister suggests announcing, Chera Kin's war march within the city walls?
   a. Alumpilvel
   b. Mattalan
   c. Cattan
   d. Kottai

3.8.3 Canto XXVI: Removing the Stone

The canto has 273 lines. Lines 1-21, is the preparation for battle. Chera King marches towards the north with his army and speaks to the public. Chera King is enraged, as the northern kings had challenged the authority of souther kings and humiliated them.

In Lines 22-87, Chera King is praised for his valour and blessed by the priests. The Puram thinais are interspersed in the canto, the Patan/Padaan deals with the glorification of the warrior while the Kanci/Kaanji thinai is bringing in the narrative of impermanence of life. The castebutams in the Cheral kingdom have an important role to play in the ministry, the purohita vocalize the sacred chants of divine proportion and also instill the soldier with vigor. The Cheral king Cenkuttuvan practices an orthodox religion, although, without any sectarian bias. The role of fire is well established in the previous cantos as a sacrosanct and in the canto XXVI too, it is shown to be of holy consequence. It is an element of the epic, as, it establishes the channel of communication with the divine.

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[9] K. Rajan in *Territorial Divisions Gleaned from Memorial Stones* highlights that, "Commemoration of heroism is a universal act. Paying homage to the departed soul by erecting a memorial or edifice in honour of the people who laid down their lives for the sake of their society is an age-old practice in India. The character and design, the media and content of the memorials varied through the ages and space. The early memorial stones were raised in memory of the heroes who died in cattle raids but later were erected to honour the deceased who died in other circumstances too. The megalithic tombs, stupas, memorial stones, pillars and other allied ancient architectural edifices found in south India are basically memorials" (2001, p.1)

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"A Critical Commentary" of B. Mangalam in *Silappadhikaram* (2021) posits that the new form of worship marks a cultural shift from Book 1 and 2, "The reference to sacrificial fires points to the influence of Aryans over the Dravidian communities by this period. The friction between northern and southern kings indicate greater movement of ethnic groups within the sub-continent…Cultural practices show extensive presence of brahmanical rituals…The worship of Shiva, Murugan, Vishnu, along with the prevalence of beliefs and ideas of Jainism represented in Book 1 and 2 find an addition of a new deity in Book 3, namely the *Pathini Kadavul* in whose honour a temple is sought to be built in Book 3. The worship of *Pathini* initiates a new form of worship, a cult-worship of human being defied as a goddess capable of blessing the king and her subjects." (p. 225)

In Lines 88-108, Chera King reaches the foothills of the blue mountains where he is blessed by the sages who worship Shiva; "Listen, O Ceral, born in Vanci/ Through the grace of Siva of the matted hair! We are on our way to the Malaya hills,/ And it is your duty to protect the learned Brahmans/ Who live there" (Parathasarathy, 1993, p. 231). According to P. Coomaraswamy in *II-King Senkuttuvan of the Chera Dynasty* (1895);

> After he ascended the throne he went, as already stated, with his mother on a pilgrimage to the Ganges, of which journey nothing is known. But he went again several years afterwards to Northern India, this time on a tour of conquest, of which some particulars may be gathered from *Chilappatikáram* , as also other works - e.g., *Paraṇar* in *Padittuppattu*, *Maṇimekhalai* ; *Nattattanar* in *Sirupánáttuppadai*, &c.
>
> According to these, the king was one day informed by some pilgrims who had returned from North India, that the northern princes mockingly said that the Tamil kings of the day, unlike their warlike ancestors, had become effeminate. This so provoked him that he declared he would forthwith march to the North and conquer the princes who sneered at him, and compel them to carry on their heads stone from the Himalayas for fashioning the statue of the goddess Pattini to be placed in the temple which, at the request of his queen, he had determined to build. (Coomaraswamy, 1895, pp. 32-33)

In Lines 110-136, dancers from Konkani country, dancers from Kutaku country and panegyrists came to bless the Cheral king. Lines 137-172 is a conversation between "Samjaya" the leader of messengers sent by the northern kings and Cheral King Cenkuttuvan/Senguttuvan. The Cheral king replies;

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Kanaka and Vijay

Sons of Balakumara, and other northern kings

With unbridled tongues poured scorn

On the Tamil kings during a banquet, ignorant

Of their courage. Like the god of death, this army

Marches forth with untamed fury. Inform

King Satakarni and ask him to get ready

For us as large fleet of boats to cross the holy Ganga (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 233)

In lines 174-273 follows the aesthetic stylistic *Puram* domain of Vanci thinai to describe the preparation of war to take over enemies' land; Ulinai to announce the movement towards victory through siege; Tumpai to show the battle waged against the enemy and Vakai to celebrate victory is unique to the Sangam. Nature plays a very important role in the life of the people of the ancient Tamil society.

The ingenious use of landscapes has also been constrained as an oral residue while it is evidenced to be true by scholars. Yet, the ecocentric understanding of uri, karu, and mutual elements in the text is exceptional in the literature comprising the Sangam academy from the south of the India. "Danced to the music of ghost with eyes/ Like drumheads." is a reference to Pinrerkkuravai which is a war dance of celebrating the chariot which brought victory to the Cheral king. The criticism of soldiers who cast off their war garments to adorn ascetic robes is significant in understanding the atrocity of wars where innocent blood is shed and makes it an unrighteous Karma that cannot be justified through the Dharma.

Check Your Progress

1. The Chera King, Cenkuttuvan, is going in which direction to bring the memorial stone
   a. North
   b. South
   c. East
   d. West
2. Write a short note on the allies of Cenkuttuvan.

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3.8.4 Canto XXVII: The Lustration

The Canto comprises of 276 lines and begins as; "The image of the goddess Pattini, giver of rain,/ Was engraved on the stone brought from the renowned Himalaya" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 276). The Chera King defeated the northern kings and a stone was brought to edify Kannagi as Goddess Pattini. The memorial stone is not only a site of worship but also a mark of territory. In the article *Territorial Division as Gleaned from Memorial Stones* (2001), the author highlights that commemoration has been a part of ancient Tamil Culture. In another article *The Lay of the Anklet* (1968) Kamil. V. Zvelebil (1927-2009) a renowned Czech scholar of Tamil linguistics and literature defines *The Cilappatikaram*/ *Silappadikaram* as;

> First of all, What is Silappadigaram? According to Adiyarkunnallar, the medieval commentator on the work, it is an iyalicainãtakapporultotarnilaicceyyul, which means "a poetical work dealing with a story with elements of song and dance or music and drama." This is not a bad definition of the main properties of the work, but it is hardly a satisfactory answer to the question: What is Silappadigaram?
>
> My answer is:
>
> 1. It is a saga of the cult of Goddess Pattini.
> 2. It is the first literary expression and the first ripe cultural fruit of the Dravidian-Aryan synthesis.
> 3. It is the first consciously national work of Tamil literature, a literary expression of the fact that the Tamils had by that time attained nationhood.
> 4. It is, of course, a supreme work of art.

K.V. Zvelebil's definition for the narrative and subject matter of the epic *The Cilappatikaram* (1968) proportionately defines the domain of *Puram* thinai as can also be discerned from the Canto. In lines 1-50, we notice that the Cheral King is a just ruler, a brave warrior and an honorable man. The soldiers' of enemy northern kings are praised for their nobel lineage by the "goblins with sunken eyes; who had died…To each soldier, he said:/"Come here"/A golden sirissa flower he offered him." (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 239). The Goblins[10] in the narrative are an instance of "Mutal" Alvar[11] Bhakti tradition[12], who in

[10] According to the 'Postscript' in *The Cilappatikaram* (1993), translated by R. Parthasarathy, although "The Book of Pukar/Puhar" (Book 1) was published by U.V. Caminataiyar in 1872, the other two books were published in 1892.

[11] There are twelve types of Alvar saints, they belong to the Vaisnava sect of Bhakti tradition.

[12] A shrine-centered cult, shamanistic features, and a nascent form of bhakti, worship of Murukan, seem to appear in new form in the later Bhakti movements. Perhaps this ancient Tamil cult, when brought into contact

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their hymns sang "Tirivikiraman" of mystics meeting God Visnu, in the *The Vedas and Bhakti Harmonized- Kovalur: The Mutual Alvars and Tirymankai* (2021), a goblin is the mystic "Putam", which also signifies "truth". According to Glenn E. Yocum in *Shrines, Shamanism and Love Poetry* (1973), *"*As opposed to the Brahmanical tradition, the early bhakti laid no emphasis on caste. One could not be disqualified from becoming a devotee because of of caste" (p. 7). Hence, the repetitive reference to the tribal and folk rituals, dances and forms of worship converging with the history of war and victory in *The Cilappatikaram* is a point in ancient Tamil Sangam period of interaction with other religions and cultures.

In lines 51-124, Brahman Mātalan narrates the fate of the family and friends of Kovalan and Kannagi. Matari, the cowheardess in whose care the ascetic Kavunti had left Kovalan and Kannagi on hearing the news of Kannagi's fate leapt into the fire. Ascetic Kavunti similarly starved herself to death. Mātalan informed the family of Kovalan and Kannagi living in Puhar about their demise. Kovalan's father renounced his wealth and entered the "sevenfold monastery of Indra", Kovalan's mother died due to grief. Kannagi's father took vows before the Ajivikas[13] and observed penance, and his wife died of grief. Madhavi/Matavi the courtesan on hearing the news of the death of her lover Kovalan decided to send her daughter Manimekalai to a Buddhist nunnery.

In lines 125-276, Brahman Mātalan is given "fifty measures of gold" equal to the body weight of Chera king. The Chera King then speaks to the Northern kings and rages against the princes who fled the battlefield disguised as ascetics like eunuchs. The Chera King leaves the norther plain and begins his journey back to Chera kingdom. The Chera kingdom is decorated to welcome the triumphant king, the Chera queen is clothed and jewelled for the King. Lines 229-233 utilize the *Agam* thinai Kurinji to express the joy of Chera queen on the prospect of meeting the victorious King, she becomes the metaphor for the entire kingdom which is King's divine right;

> The wives have to bear the consequences of their husbands actions as they are 'ideal wives'. The portrayal of the wife is couched in the patriarchal set up of the society whereby both the wives were more than willing to sacrifice their ornaments for the well-being of their husbands. It almost emerges like it was

with Brahmanical traditions regarding the quest for salvation and the cults of the gods Visnu and Siva, given the historical situation of seventh-century South India, provided the stimulus stimulus for the development of popular Tamil bhakti. (Yocum, 1973, p.17)

[13] Ajivikas is the *Nāstika* (Heterodox*)* school of thought in Indian Philosophical tradition. They did not believe on Vedas to be the only authoritative text and fate according to them is time and karmic cycle which determines the role and destination of soul.

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> the wives duty to safeguard the image of her husband and that alone was the most important thing in her life. The second point that is that without her husband, there was no reason for a wife to live…It is noteworthy that the women's world had an end that met with the ideals of patriarchy. (Singh, 2014, p.105)

The canto progresses its narrative with the Song of the Hill dwellers who are singing the praise of victorious Chera King. Flutes being played by the cowherds, and love songs being sung by fisherwomen. The Chera King "drawn by elephants, entered Vanci" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 248). The songs correspond with three different phases—Erotic, Mythic and Heroic.

Check Your Progress

1. Explain the emergence of early Bhakti elements, with reference to the Canto.
2. Critically examine the sequence of the conversation between Matalan and Cenkuttuvan.

3.8.5 Canto XXVIII: The Dedication of the Memorial Stone

The Canto has 240 lines, lines 1-45, continue with the celebratory modality of Canto XXVII, and women diffuse through the streets of Vanci, "The presence of festivals and the courtesans and artistes in the cities seem to be a thread binding all the sources…" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 101). In *The Cilappatikaram* the women are either chaste, or public women, but one role that they have in common within the text is of providing pleasure and softness to the harsh world of men. The *Agam* and *Puram* thinai than can be contextualized as feminine and masculine principles which overlap at times, yet, are strictly distinct from each other. In lines 46-80 the Chera king meets his queen Venmal and their meeting is celebrated with;

> Then a Cakkaiyan, an expert in dance from Paraiyur[14]
> Renowned for brahmans proficient in the four Vedas,
> Performed for the king's pleasure the kotticcetam
> Danced by Siva, with Uma as part of himself,



Fig. 1 Dancing Ardhanārī, Bronze, Colombo Museum, No. 1982.88.1 (after VON SCHROEDER 1991: 107)

[14] Paraiyur is a folk dance, the word 'Parai' means drum.

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To the rhythm of the tinkling anklet on his feet. (Prthhasarathy, 1993, p. 251)

The performance of Cakkaiyan is significant for the epic, as it is an important point of conflation between the folk/tribal and the court. Also, '*Maturapati'* the clan deity of the Pantiyan lineage is a form of Ardhanarisvara. The image has been taken from the article *Dance of Ardhanari as Pattini-Kannaki —with special reference to the Cilappatikaram* (2000). In the article R.K.K. Rajarajan;

> In the *Cilappatikaram*, the folk deity Pattini-Kannaki is compared with many gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Later, as a result of Sanskritization, the folk deity of the Tamil country is identified with Siva as Ardhanårïsvara. Before taking up the Colombo bronze for discussion, a succinct account of the previous works on the subject and the image may be presented…The Colombo museum Pattini-Kannaki image is the only one of its type ever reported.

1. WICRAMAGAMAGE was the first to write about the image in 1980 identifying it as "Ardhanårisvara in the form of Hari-Hara". Consequently, in 1983 and 1990 he again published the image and discussed the above concept. He dates the image to 9th century.
2. MIRANDO (1982) identifies it as "Avalokitesvara and Sakti".
3. WIJESEKERA (1984) identifies the image as "Ardhanarisvara" and dates it to the 9th-10th century.
4. PREMATILLEKE (1986) also identifies it as "Ardhanarisvara" and dates it to the 5th-6th century.
5. LAKDUSINGHE (1987) discusses all the earlier works on the image; he also cites the *Cilappadikåram*. He accepts the identification of the icon as "Ardhanåri", dating it to circa 7th-10th century.
6. HETTIARATCHI (1990) identifies it as "Ardhanarinatesvara" and dates it specifically the reign of King Manavamma (684-718 A.D.) as the figurine has some characteristic features of Pallava sculpture.
7. Von SCHROEDER cites in his works (1990, 1991&1992) the above Sri Lankan scholars and brings the icon under the heading Ardhanårïsvara. He dates the icon to the 7th-8th century, as it is of the Late Anurådhåpura period. (Rajarajan, 2000, pp. 402-403)

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The lines 81-240, is a conversation between the Chera king, brahman Mātalan, Nīlan and the messengers in the audience hall of his palace. The narrative in the canto shifts when the king enjoying the dance with his queen is informed by the gatekeeper of the arrival of messengers, Mātalan and Nīlan. Nīlan reported to the Chera king "indiscreet" comments by the Chola and Pantiya kings who condemned the brutality shown by the Chera King against the northern kings. Cenkuttuvan laughed on hearing the views of Chola and Pantiyan kings. Brahman Mātalan came up with the solution that Cenkuttuvan (Chera King) should perform "great sacrifice/ With the help of priests versed in the four vedas" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p.255) and free the northern kings in Chera King's captivity;

> He (Chera King) ordered the Arya kings
> Removed from prison and taken outside the city
> Of Vanci of great renown to Velavikko Palace,
> Enclosed by ponds and cool groves.
> They were informed they could return
> To their cities at the end of the sacrifice…(Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 254-55)

The Chera king not only made preparation for the great sacrifice, he also freed the northern kings and ordered his revenue ministers to remit all taxes of the citizens. The *Puram* thinai used in the following lines is Kaanji (Transience of life). Brahman Mātalan reasons with the king by making him understand the cycle of Karma and his duty as a just king to maintain a balance, hence, he advices him to free the northern kings, and perform the great sacrifice. The action of Chera King strategically situates him in a position of power and respect amongst the Pantiya and Chola kings because he has earned a favor of the people of his kingdom.

According to *Role of Peasants in the Early History of Tamilakam* (1988), "At this juncture the advent of the brahmins as the courtiers an priests of the Tamil chiefs, in combination with a variety of oth factors, led to the rise of the three dan chiefs of the interior, the Cera, Cola and the Pandya, and the strengthening of the machinery of State The growth of Roman trade in the early centuries of the Christian era might have played a part in this process, but it had no enduring impac on the predominantly agrarian social structure. The acceleration stratification expressed itself through the brahmin-chieftain alliance. It also led to the formation of a temple-centred and caste-oriented feudal social structures." (Narayanan, 1988, p.26)

In the line 215-240, the Goddess Pattini is exalted for her establishment of justice by making the Tamil Kings realise that "The virtue of women is useless if the king/Rules

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unjustly." (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 256). She is defied with the help of Chera King and his counsellors who installed the stone[15] of Goddess Pattini and performed a dedication. According to Kamil V. Zvelebil in *The Lay of the Anklet* (1968); "Anyhow, the cult of Kannagi- Pattini must have been well established in Cheranad; but, at the same time, Jainism and Buddhism were still flourishing in the South, which shows also that Ilango composed his poem sometime between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the seventh century" (p. 10).

According to B. Mangalam in *Silappadhikaram* (2021) Goddess Pattini becomes the source for legitimizing the rule of Chera King, her power is wielded for social and political authority of Chera Kingdom. Kannagi in her divine form as Goddess Pattini becomes the symbol of chastity, dispenser of justice, and upholder of divinely ordained fate. The essays of Gananath Obeyesekere, and V.S. Rajam are discussed in part 3 of this Study Material to understand the significance of Goddess Pattini in the epic.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a short note on *The Great Sacrifice* performed by Cenkuttuvan.
2. Examine the role go Cenkuttuvan, as a kind and just king.
3. Whose memorial stone was deified by Cenkuttuvan?
   a. Kannagi
   b. Kovalan
   c. Matari
   d. Kavunti

3.8.6 XXIX: The Benediction

The Benediction is the last song cycle of the epic, it has 29 stanzas. The first stanza narrates the family history of Cenkuttuvan. The stanza ends with Tevanti, Kannagi's foster mother, Kannagi's close friend, and Aiyai- The daughter of herdswoman Matari[16] journeying towards

[15] In January 1968, a statue of Kannaki, the protagonist of the Tamil epic Silappatikaram was installed on the Marina beach front in Madras. It marked the arrival of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a regional party, as an independent ruling party of Madras state in 1967. It also marked the event of the International Tamil Conference held that year. The statue stands there to this day. The inscription in English identifies her as Kannaki: The Perfection of Chastity. Prabha Rani and Vaidyanathan Shivkumar in *An Epic as a Socio Political Pamphlet* , published in 2011, in the journal Portes.

[16] Matari was the herdwoman in whose care Jaina ascetic Kavunti left Kovalan and Kannagi in Book 2: The Chapter of Madurai. Matari self-immolated after hearing about the death of Kovalan and Kannagi's fate.

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Cenkuttuvan's palace in Vanci. In the article *II-King Senkuttuvan*[17] *of the Chera Dynasty* (1895) P. Coomáraswámy delineates the available material on King Cenkuttuvan/ Senkuttuvan of the Chera dynasty in Tamil literature. According to him, the Chera king was the son of King Seralatan and Queen Sonai/Natsonai, Sonai was the daughter of Chola king Karikala. Seralatan had two sons, the elder Cenkuttuvan and younger Ilango Adigal/Ilankoadikal. Once a priest prophesied that the younger Ilango Adigal will succeed the throne of Chera and not Senkuttuvan. Hence, Ilango Adigal renounced the world and lived in Kunavayil—a town east of Vanci—a wrote the epic *The Cilappatikaram.*

Stanza 2-3-4, in the Canto are a monologue by Tevanti, Kannagi's foster mother and the close friend of Kannagi. Stanza 2, is the monologue of Tevanti who introduces herself to King Cenkuttuvan of the Chera as a friend of Kannagi. Stanza 3 is the monologue of Foster Mother who introduces herself as the care taker of young Kannagi. She describes Kannagi as a dutiful wife, kind and brave woman to the Chera King. The 4th stanza is the monologue of a close friend of Kannagi who introduces herself to the Chera king as a friend of dutiful and chaste Kannagi. The epic's narrative strategy according to B. Mangalam's "A Critical Commentary" in *Silappadhikaram* (2021) borrows from the bardic oral traditions which can be figured out from the prose and lyrics placed one after another in the canto as a pattern to move towards conclusion.

The epic also uses the element of chance and fate, for example, Tevanti from Canto IX in Book 1: The Chapter of Puhar reemerges in Canto XXIX as a witness and an authorizing agency. Tevanti is married to Pācanta Cāttan, a deity of Puhar. In Canto IX Kannagi tells Tevanti about her ominous dream and Tevanti shares with Kannagi the rules of Karmic cycle because of which Kovalan left Kannagi for Madhavi. It is for the first time in the epic we see the emergence of theological and philosophical[18] context which derives its meaning from the magico-religious belief system. Tevanti a chaste women herself legitimizes the chastity and purity of Kannagi—as Goddess Pattini—the narrative strategy was itself employed by Kannagi in Canto XXI: The Crown of Wrath, where Kannagi tells the Pantiyan queen the story of "The Seven Chaste Women".

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[17] Senguttuvan, Cenkuttuvan and Senkuttuvan are different spellings of the same name. Cenkuttuvan is the Chera King in the epic. He establishes the shrine of Goddess Pattini-Kannagi.

[18] Theological and Philosophical here implies the study of religion and life. In ancient Tamil society the cosmic time overlapped with the human Karmic time in such a way that it was identifiable because the Gods and deities made their presence known to the people by intervening in domains of justice, there were ponds in the Tamil Kingdoms where the water helped in remembering the past life, and various other magico-religious components.

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Stanza 5-6-7, is the lamentation of Tevanti, foster mother and close friend of kannagi in front of Kannagi's memorial stone. Tevanti cries that the mother-in-law and mother of Kannagi died of grief, the Forster mother cries that Mācāttuvān, Kovalan's father and Mānāykan, Kannagi's father renounced the world. Stanza 8-9-10 continues with the modality of lamentation, in Stanza 8 Aiyai , daughter of Matari is shown the memorial stone, in stanza 9 Cenkuttuvan sees a vision in the sky and in stanza 10 the vision reveals herself as Goddess Pattini—Kannagi;

What Kannaki Said

Blameless is the Pantiyan, now an honored guest
In the palace of the king of the gods.
I am his daughter. I am going to play
On Venvelān's hill. Friends, come here, all of you! (Parthasarathy, 1993, p.261)

It is important to note that in the lines above, while the older and married women speak in the court which is the public place. The unmarried and young Aiyai maintains her veil of silence. The literary device of antithesis—the *Puram* in Canto XXIV conflates with the internal *Agam*, in Canto XXIX *Agam* meets the *Puram* to honour the memorial stone, a sort of reconciliation— the sequence works well to situate Book 3 in the domain of epic, which is both dramatic and didactic.

The 5th song cycle in the epic starts with a preface (stanza 1), lamentation (stanza 2), and Stanza 11-29 is divided into 7 parts;

Stanza Number	Title	Summary
11	What the Girls of Vanci Said	Praise-Kannagi and the Tamil Kings (Chola, Chera and Pantiyan)
12	The Girl's Chorus	Praise-Vanavan/Vaiyai (The title of Chera king)
13-15	The Blessing	They bless the city of Madurai, Puhar and Vanci.

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Stanza Number	Title	Summary
16-19	Song of the Wooden Ball	"Ammanai" is a question-answer game being played, the girls ask 4 questions—Who guards the kings of gods? Who offered his own flesh to save a dove? Who engraved the tiger-emblem? Why women sing inside their home?—they praise the city of Puhar (Chola).
20-22	The Song of the Ball	The girls bless and praise the Tamil Kings and "Tennavan" (The Pantiyan King)
23-25	The Song of the Swing	The Girls praise the Chera King.
26-29	The Song of the Pestle	Praising the women of Chera, Chola and Puhar—praising Kannagi.

The stanzas 11-29 are praises and blessings sung for the people and Kings of Puhar (Chola), Madurai (Pantiyan) and Vanci (Chera)—the seek for blessings of Goddess Pattini. The songs according to B. Mangalam in *Silappadhikaram* (2021) "A Critical Commentary" explains, "These act as benedictory choric songs and convey the epic vision of a particular civilization and its people's cultural roots. The songs highlight the subjects' fondness of their kings and the popular legends built around them" (p. 235). The songs use tribal/folk musical forms, such as, "Ammanai". According to *Ethnomusicology and India*, the tribal and folk music is based the cycle of activities in a year accompanied by dance. The rhythm structure of the *Agam* songs in Canto XXIX reflects on the peculiarities of ancient oral culture of Tamil culture. The utilisation of bardic music tradition with the dedication of Kannagi chiefly reflects on the changing socio-cultural and political structures during the Sangam period.

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Check Your Progress

1. Explain the role of *The Benediction* in *The Cilappatikaram.*
2. Who is appointed as the priest for the shrine of ananku?
   a. Tevanti b. Matari
   c. Aiyai d. Kavunti

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3.8.7 Canto XXX: The granting of a Favor

The Canto has 215 lines. The canto (lines 1-36) begins with the conversation between Tevanti and the Cheral King Cenkuttuvan. Cenkuttuvan asks Tevanti;

> "Who is this Manimekalai for whom you cried
>
> Your eyes out? Why did she renounce the world?
>
> Tell me." (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 259)

Tevanti then tells the Chera King Cenkuttuvan the story of the daughter of courtesan Madhavi[19]. Citrapati was the mother of Madhavi, when Madhavi gave birth to a daughter "Manimekalai"— Citrapati asked Madhavi "What do you have in mind?" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p.260). Madhavi replied that Manimekalai will renounce the material world and will not continue with the hereditary profession as a courtesan. Manimekalai entered a buddhist nunnery. The lines draw upon a *Puram* thinai Kaanji "to elaborate upon the path of renunciation for ensuring one's liberation" (Mangalam, 2001, p. 238). According to Gananath Obeyesekere in *The Cult of Goddess Pattini*[20] (1984), "Mādēvi (Matavi), the courtesan, joined a Buddhist nunnery (Dikshitar 1939, p. 308)[21], and her daughter Manimēkalai later became a Buddhist saint (Dikshitar 1939, p. 330). The *Manimēkalai*, which deals with the story of Mādēvi's daughter, is outspokenly and polemically Buddhist…Thus the evidence of the two classic epics[22] suggests that Pattini was both Jaina *and* Buddhist…rooted in the heterodox religions of South India—Buddhism, Jainism, and to a lesser extent Ājīvakaism[23], rather than Vedic Hinduism, Brahmanism, or Dravidian folk religion." (p. 514)

In Lines 37-68 Tevanti enters a state of "trance", with a faint smile on her lips and red eyes she stood up. Tēvantikai in an "unusual voice" spoke;

[19] Madhavi is the love interest of Kovalan. Kovalan is the husband of Kannagi. Kannagi is Goddess Pattini. There story is narrated in Book 1: The Chapter of Puhar. Kovalan left Madhavi when he felt she being a courtesans is singing songs for another lover. Later in Book 2 Kovalan realizes his mistake after receiving the sealed letter written by Madhavi from Brahaman Matalan in Canto XXV.

[20] Obeyesekere, Gananath. *The Cult of Goddess Pattini*. Chicago, The University of Chicago, 1984.

[21] Adigal, Ilango. *The Silappadikaram* trans. V.R.R. Dikshitar. England, Oxford University Press, 1939.

[22] *The Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai* are twin epics, which means *Manimekalai* is the sequel of *The Cilappatikaram. The Cilappatikaram* elaborates on the 3 of the 4 ends of human life which are Dharma (Duty and Righteousness), Artha (Material Wealth), Kama (Desire)—and Manimekalai discussed the 4th end of human life, Moksha (Liberation).

[23] Ajivikas is the *Nāstika* (Heterodox*)* school of thought in Indian Philosophical tradition. They did not believe on Vedas to be the only authoritative text and fate according to them is time and karmic cycle which determines the role and destination of soul.

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Among the good, modest,
And beautiful women, who came here for the dedication
Of the goddess are the twin girls born to the wife
Of Arattan Cetti, and the little daughter of Cetakkutumpi,
Employed in the service of the lord resting
On the divine serpent in the golden temple.
Near the temple of Mankalatevi, there is a hill
That touches the sky. On its red summit
Is a bowline rock with many pools.
Springs leap from them with white stones
Like coral-tree flowers. Those who bathe
In these pools recall their past births.
I brought that water and gave it to you,
O brahman Matālan, when you were resting
At the gate of that temple and said: "Take this.
Look after it. Aren't you keeping it in the pot
Inside the string bag in your hand? The water
Will not lose its power till the sun and mo0on
Vanish. If you would, therefore, sprinkle it
Upon these three little girls, they will recall
Their past births. I am god Pācantan,
Speaking through the body of this brahman woman. (Parthasarathy, 1993, p.270)

Tevanti in a "trance" speaks that she is God Pacantan (he). The girls who have accompanied Tevanti are the daughters of "Of Arattan Cetti, and the little daughter of Cetakkutumpi" (Parthasarathy, 1993, p.270) and God Pacantan in the form of Tevanti asks Brahman Matalan to sprinkle water on these girls. The water brought from a pool near the temple of Mankalatevi and is in the care of Brahman Matalan, this water when sprinkled on the girls will help them remember their past life. The intrigues aspect of Tevanti's "trance" is twofold, firstly the significance of the episode within the epic, secondly the socio-historical context of the public event within the domain of *Agam* (internal). The significance of the episode within the text is relatively interesting and simple, which according to Clarence Maloney in

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Religious Beliefs and Social Hierarchy in Tamil Nadu, India (1975) can be viewed as solidarity and participation;

> The purpose of ritual in the worship of the village deities, in the minds of these people, is to intensify the relationship between the worshiping individual or group and the deity, and more specifically, to bend the will of the god and alter the natural course of events. However, because ritual is by definition symbolic, objective observers can also see that it derives from the social setting, enhancing the solidarity of the participating group and defining that group in relation to other groups. (p. 186)

The "trance" is an important ritualistic presence in the collective memory of the people and a way to ascertain passing of the oral history. Hence, the socio-historical aspect of the event is its shamanistic features. According to *Shrines, Shamanism, and Love Poetry: Elements in the Emergence of Popular Tamil Bhakti* (1973)*;*

> The ecstasy and the presence of the deity manifested in the course of a frenzied dance. In fact, the most common Tamil word for shaman is *cāmiyāti*, literally a "god-dancer", and modern ethnological accounts of South Indian shamanism report that the god is said to descend (*iranku*) on the individual. (p. 9)

In lines 69-114, Brahman Matalan sprinkles water on the girls and they remember their past life. The three girls in their past life were: Kannagi's mother, Kovalan's mother and Matari. The lines describes the sorrow of the bereaved parents of Kovalan, Kannagi and the herds-women Matari, all three cry about the pain of loss in front of the Chera King Cenkuttuvan;

> And so the three girls, their arms
> Glowing with bangles, with childlike lips
> Spoke their elders' words, grieving again and again
> Before the king with gems sparkling on his chest. (Parthasarathy, 1993, p. 272)

In the line 115-143, Brahman Matalan explains to the Chera King that the twins born to Arattan Cetti were Kovalan and Kannagi's mothers in the previous birth, while Matari has been reborn as the daughter of Cetakkutumpi. In these line the narrative continues with the sequence of rebirth of people who were friends and family of Kannagi. The idea of rebirth is central to the cyclical idea of karma as is put fore by Ilango In Book 3: The chapter of

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Maturai the account of rebirth uses *Puram* thinai Kanci/ Kaanji. According to Anne E. Monius in *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (2001), "The *Cilappatikaram's* most commonly used term for karma (ulvinai) suggests an element of the Ajivika notion of fate (Sanskrit niyati, Tamil ul)…the deification of Kannaki-Pattini, "giver of abundant rain" (van *taru cirappin*), becomes but a temporary and ultimately unsatisfactory state, for it is only in human birth that one can achieve final liberation."[24] Jainism and Buddhism is similar in its views on deities' incarnation and rebirth, that, Kannagi will influence the universe for a fixed time and will be be reborn till she finally attains moksha. (Please read footnote 22 at the end of this page).

In lines 144-198 the Chera King gives grants to the temple of Pattini and places Tevanti in the Pattini temple as priest. The women in the epic have been the dominant voice in the *Akam/Agam* and the neat demarcation between *Kalavu* (Premarital and marital love) and *Karpu* (extramarital love) is criticized and transgressed through the apotheosis of Kannagi who in legitimizing the rule of the Cheral king also locates women in a position of power that was achieved through the breaking of anklet and dismembering of the female sexual organ. Then Chera King then speaks to the freed northern kings, the Konku ruler of the west, the king of Malva, and the king of Sri Lanka Gajabāhu. The kings along with the Chera King praise Goddess Pattini. Gananath Obeyesekere in *The Cult of Goddess Pattini* (1984) calls the presence of the king of Srilanka during the memorial stone dedication as "Gajabahu synchronism". According to Obeyesekere, the presence of Gajabāhu only works as a proof that Pattini was worshipped in Tamil east coast and Sinhala (Sri Lanka). Although, Gajabahu is not referred to in Buddhist texts *Mahāvamsa* and *Dīpavamsa* which were composed in 4-5th century, a form of maintaining a record of events such as foreign dignitaries visiting India. But in two works written in Sinhala rather than Pāli[25] during 17-18th century, *Rājaratnākara* and *Rājāvaliya* mentions *Gajabāhu's* visit to South India. Though, "in the *Cilappatikāram Gajabāhu* is not the hero of Sinhala[26] myth. He is subservient to Cenkuttuvan, who is the grandiose hero in the Tamil epic…a fascinating example of a mythic figure adapted to suit divergent sociohistorical conditions in two neighboring countries…".(p. 363-65) Although, this is a socio-historically significant interpolation within the text as it highlights the migratory routes in ancient India. According to P. Coomaraswamy in *II-King*

[24] *The Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai* are twin epics, which means *Manimekalai* is the sequel of *The Cilappatikaram. The Cilappatikaram* elaborates on the 3 of the 4 ends of human life which are Dharma (Duty and Righteousness), Artha (Material Wealth), Kama (Desire)—and Manimekalai discussed the 4th end of human life, Moksha (Liberation).

[25] Pali: Middle Indic language, one of the major languages on Buddhist Text.

[26] Sinhala: Language of Indo-Aryan ethnolinguistic group of Sri Lanka, mostly Buddhists.

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Senkuttuvan of the Chera Dynasty (1895) Gajabāhu mentioned in *The Cilappatikaram* is the Gajabāhu I "who reigned the Ceylon between 113-135 of the years of Christ" (p. 36).

In lines 169-198 Ilango Adigal, the author of *The Cilappatikaram* narrates that he was present in the audience hall of the Chera King when Tevanti was again possessed by a god. The god commands the people to live a morally justified life and abstain from meat, bad company, and falsehood. The agency which was bestowed to the enraged woman of Canto XXI is silenced through her deification as a sacred stone in Canto XXVI. The Chera King becomes the authoritative voice in the epic with the blessings of the goddess of chastity (Goddess Pattini) in Canto XXX.

In "Coda" which means conclusion (lines 199-215) the Chera King Cenkuttuvan is celebrated for his victories and justice. The modality of festivity is used to highlight the splendor of Vanci;

> Here ends "The Book of Vanci." It sings
> Among the three crowned kings, of the virstures,
> Triumphs, and heroism of the ruler
> Of the western kingdom, a wreath of flowers
> Glowing on his chest, born in the Ceral line;
> Of the preeminence of the glorious, old city
> Of Vanci; of the endless joy of its subjects;
> Of the abundance of food; of the songs and dances
> With their fine interrelationships; of his army
> Of sword-warriors who won decisive victories
> In battle by fair methods; of his success
> In following the enemy for long distance
> In the wide, foaming sea; and his expedition
> To the banks of the holy Gamga. All these things,
> Including others as well, reflect the career
> Of Cenkuttuvan. Only a glimpse of it is offered here.

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Check Your Progress

1. What purpose does the sequence of *rebirth* has in *The Cilappatikarma?*
2. Write a short on the presence of Gaza Bahu in the epic?
3. Kannagi's father took a vow before—
   a. Ajivikas
   b. Bhakti
   c. None of the above.

3.8.8 Epilogue

The epilogue in *The Cilappatikaram* written by Ilango Adigal has 14 lines. It is divided into three parts/books/chapters, each part is associated with a particular kingdom; Book 1: The Chapter of Puhar (Chola dynasty), Book 2: The Chapter of Madurai (Pantiyan/ Pandiya/Pantiya dynasty) , and Book 3: The Chapter of Vanci (Chera dynasty)[27]. The purpose of the epilogue in an epic is to provide a conclusion to the text, in *The* Cilappatikaram Ilango employee the narrative strategy to bind the three parts of the text together in an epic;

Here ends the *Cilappatikaram*. It ends, in truth,
With the story of *Manimekalai*. Like a mirror
Reflecting the far hills, it reflects the essence
And Venkatam, and by the eastern and western seas.
It comprises the five landscapes of pure and impure Tamil
Where live gods and humans performing their duty
And practicing virtue, wealth and love.
Its nobel language expresses in perfect rhythm
Good sense, themes of love and war,
Exquisite songs, the lute, musical mode, chants,
Drama, acts and scenes, dances
That conform to the established rules of vari[28]

[27] Read—-Part 1 of the study material, for further details and synopsis of the entire story.

[28] Masquerade dance of Tamil region corresponding with each of the geographical regions associated with *Puram* and *Agam* thinai/tinai.

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Round dance and cētam[29], put in simple and perfect Tamil.

The lines are dedicated to the story of *The Cilappatikaram* and conclude the epic. The epilogue announce the second part (sequel) *Manimekalai*, a Tamil Buddhist epic which was written by Chithalai Chathanar (Cattanar/ Satthanar)[30] around 5-6th century. Notably, *The Cilappatikaram's* prologue starts as a conversation between Poet Cattan (Satthanat/Cattanar) and Chera prince Ilango Adigal who became a Jaina ascetic. According to B. Mangalam in "A Critical Commentary" in *Silappadhikaram* (2001), "The Epilogue strings together references to *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimegalai.* The take ends not at the end of Canto 30, but traverses through its continuities that culminate in the epic *Manimegalai*. Life continue after Death, affirming through re-incarnations, continuities and re-bondings" (p. 239)

The *Agam* and the *Puram* come together in their reverence for Kannagi as an upholder of dharma. The societal fabric of the Sangam period is going through a transition. *The Cilappatikaram* narrates the fall of Maturai/Madurai and the rise of the Chera kingdom. The ascetic Ilango in his poetics draws from the theological and philosophical idea of material and the immaterial in his understanding of human subjectivity. The agency that is attributed to the immaterial transcends human time is termed as dharma and the agency which is material has been categorized as karma. The transition is brought in through the spread of various other religious, political, cultural school of thoughts in the South of India. *The Cilappatikaram* as one of the five major epics of the Sangam period saw an emergence of new trade pathways, shifting economic structures, and changing socio-cultural and belief systems.

3.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the context of *Puram* and *Agam/Akam* thinais in Book 3: The Chapter/Book of Vanci.
2. What is the role of various characters in exalting the epic elements of the text?
3. What are the four ends of human life? How have they been depicted through the third Book of *The Cilappatikaram*?
4. Explain the portrayal of dance and music in the "Song Cycles".
5. Highlight the narrative style used in deification of Goddess Pattini.
6. Elaborate on the significance of war and victory in Book 3.
7. Critically explain the role of destiny, dreams, re-birth and supernatural in Book 3.

[29] A part of dance.

[30] In the translation from Tamil to English, you may find varied spellings.

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