Prayojana and *Phala*: Reception of the Mahābhārata Through Its Commentaries

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Abstract

This paper aims to explicate the hermeneutic engagement of the commentators with the epic. The engagement is better revealed in the opening of the commentaries, particularly while commenting upon the *maṅgala* of the epic. This paper offers a comparison of insights on *maṅgala* and *anubandhacatuṣṭaya* in the three commentaries: Devabodha (11 CE), Vādirāja (16 CE) and Nīlakaṇṭha (17 CE). The singularity of this engagement is that it deals with the text as one meaningful whole. While doing so they not only analyse the text, but also renew the text by offering it its own due textuality. The due textuality is understood in contrast to the view of modern scholars who have dealt with the epic text as a conglomerate of several parts. The contexts and departures that commentators have with the text of the epic are obviously different from ours and are therefore of significance to us. The antiquity, grandeur and complexity of the epic are the obvious challenges before us as we attempt to comprehend the text. The commentaries come through as a resource as they offer their reading and comprehension of the epic. The very names of the commentaries illuminate the specific hermeneutic engagement of the commentators with the epic. Thus, Devabodha's commentary is called *Jñānadīpikā* or the Lamp of Knowledge, whereas Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary has been named as *Bhāratabhāvadīpa*, or the Lamp Illuminating Inner Meaning (of the Mahābhārata).

Introduction

> *vividhaṁ saṁhitājñānaṁ dīpayanti manīṣiṇaḥ.*
> *vyākhyātuṁ kuśalāḥ ke cid granthaṁ dhārayituṁ pare.*
>   Mahābhārata 1.1.51

The verse above from the Mahābhārata spells out the two-fold task of preservation and interpretation of the text. It reads, "the learned ones illuminate the wisdom of various types of *saṁhitā*s.[1] Some are skilled in explaining it, while others are good at preserving it." (Mahābhārata 1.1.51). The paper is about the *vyākhyākāra*s i.e. the commentators of the epic. The idea is to unravel the epistemological approach of the commentators by mainly studying their interpretation of the *maṅgala* verse of the epic. However, any commentary (*ṭīkā, vyākhyā*) inevitably entails some sort of retention of the text too, and so the two-fold *kauśalya* (skill) mentioned in the verse above, applies equally to the commentators of the epic. The following is a brief outline of the paper.

While studying the hermeneutic project of the commentators this paper begins by discussing significance of the commentaries and prejudices about them. Modern scholars have had a specific engagement with the epic which was primarily aimed at making sense of the epic. This involved translation and critical review of the constitution or composition of the epic. Naturally, the methods prevalent or already put to use for the study of European texts were applied while interpreting the Indian epic. European philology, in a way, guided the early engagement of the modern world with this grand Indian epic. The study presented in this paper is a small step to contrast the traditional way of making sense of the epic developed within India, with the European models that guided the interpretation of the epic. One stark significance of the study is that it brings forth a non-European and non-Eurocentric perspective, the traditional perspective to interpret the epic. We keep it terse here, as a

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1 The Vedas themselves are called saṁhitās. (sam + dhā = to compile, put together). Thus, the epic is called the fifth Veda. The knowledge passed down from the Vedas has been believed to be transmitted through the epic.

section of the paper elaborates on the significance of the commentaries and the prejudices associated with it.

The section 1.2 discusses some common prejudices held by some modern scholars about the commentaries which include accusations of religious bias, political motivations, historical unawareness, and sectarian biases among commentators. These biases have led to the delegitimization of native traditions of textual interpretation and the rise of the so-called historical-critical method, which Adluri & Bagchee criticize for its problematic presuppositions. The section thus situates the present study as a concrete exercise in contesting the prejudices by translating the significant portions from the commentaries expressing the interpretative position of the commentators.

Section 2 summarises the extant of the commentaries that have been considered in this paper. By extant, we mean the portions of the epic considered by the commentators to comment upon. The section holds relevance since, except that of Nilakaṇṭha's, the other two commentaries that are only partially available, commenting only upon the selected portions of some of the parvans of the epic.

Section 3 draws upon the specific verses or prose portions of the commentaries wherein their principles of textual interpretation have been articulated. This is perhaps the first time that the principles set by the three commentators of three distinct centuries have been juxtaposed and discussed in one place.

Section 4 situates the commentarial text-type as the one akin to *śāstra* literature. It is not just that the commentators have a certain *śāstra* orientation to their own thought and interpretation but that they are unhesitatingly reading the epic in some way as a *śāstra* text. While doing so they seem to be reading the characteristics of a *śāstrīya* exposition as manifested in the epic text.

Section 5, the core of the paper, offers a close reading with construal and translation of the excerpts from the commentaries on the *maṅgala* of the epic. Since the epic is being read as though it is a śāstra text, the commentators read the characteristics of a śāstra text in the opening and closure of the epic too. They do so by evoking the canonical idea like prayojana and phala. The commentators read the epic as a means to achieve the four puruṣārthas – the four ends of human life. Nīlakaṇṭha reads the epic as a *dharmaśāstra* or a *smṛti* text. Translations of the relevant portions from the Sanskrit commentaries are being offered in English along with an argument about a certain consonance about the nature and purpose of the epic among the commentators who have different sectarian and philosophical commitments. Scarce are the occurrences where the portions of the commentaries under consideration

have been translated or interpreted with some argument about the agreement in their views, and that is natural as the focus of the Mahābhārata research so far has been on the original text and commentaries have been mostly, if not fully, marginalised.

Section 6 summarises the ideas on *prayojana* and *phala* gathered from the preceding section. Section 7 concludes the paper by highlighting the consensus among the commentators on identifying the epic as a *dharmaśāstra* text by reading in the formal aspects like *prayojana* and *phala* and *anubandhacatuṣṭaya*.

1   The Significance of the Commentaries

The very idea of unity of the epic or making sense of the epic as a whole gained its nuanced footing in the writings of Sukthankar (particularly, Sukthankar (1957)), though as has been pointed out by De Jong (1984: 12) and Sukthankar (1957: 19–21), it was Dahlmann who had a certain vision of the unity of the epic. Indeed, there are reasons and ways in which the unity and the sense of the epic as a whole is itself recoverable from the past. Even before, we, in the modern times, arrived at a critical edition, the commentators of the epic were dealing with the epic. This epic is indeed the whole for them and it remains yet to be explored what is their idea of integrity of the epic. Our interest in the commentarial literature is actually manifold. While the meaning of the epic as envisaged by each commentary may be deferred until we study the commentaries to that depth, we can certainly embark upon the surfaces which are more fecund in terms of betraying their epistemic or even ideological location. A comparison of the commentaries on the *maṅgala* (the opening verse) of the Mahābhārata is one such avenue wherefrom we depart to understand commentarial lens to the epic. Sukthankar emphasized the study of the commentaries as a necessary complement to critical studies of the Mahābhārata. Sukhthankar says,

> The study of these commentaries must be now taken up more serious-ly, not so much for the sake of the explanations contained in the com-mentaries – though even the glosses of a commentator like Devabodha are extremely important as for the readings and *pāṭhāntaras* recorded in them; because most of the commentaries are older – some very much older than our manuscripts; and therefore, the documentation of these readings by the commentators takes us back to a stage further in our in-vestigation of the history of the epic.
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> SUKTHANKAR (1944: 264)

Sukthankar considers commentaries to be critically important. Commentators likely had access to manuscripts or texts of the epic that were unavailable to the compilers of the Critical Edition later. Sukthankar sees commentaries as key resources for understanding earlier versions of the epic, potentially even older than the earliest surviving manuscripts. We are more interested in the commentaries as a historical source to study the history of the reception of the grand epic. Besides the antiquity and their relevance for arriving at a text of the epic, recovering the older ways of interpreting the epic is our primary concern in studying the commentaries.

Hypothetical theories like Bardic hypothesis, Brahmanic hypothesis, Kṣatriya hypothesis, and War Narrative hypothesis,[2] proposed by the German Indologists were predominant in the field of epic studies. These hypotheses intended to arrive at the Ur–Mahābhārata by following the mechanical exercises of the historical critical method. The method had a commitment to the then extant manuscripts and weighed the objectives of their higher criticism more over the retrieval of the manuscript i.e. lower criticism. The above-mentioned hypotheses were at the core of the higher criticism, and therefore, produced an understanding of the epic which was overshadowed and limited by those hypotheses. The traditional reception of the text, in that scenario, obviously, held little value. Further, with the advent of the theories like war nucleus,[3] disengagement with the idea of uniformity of the epic text became more obvious.

The editors or the scholars involved in the making of the Critical Edition have realised the significance of the commentaries and made use of the commentaries to accomplish the task at their disposal. The Chief Editor of the Critical Edition Sukthankar emphasises on the study of the commentaries to understand the traditional reception of the epic. Sukthankar (1944: 264) has discussed twenty-two commentators of the Mahābhārata. Sukthankar considers Nīlakaṇṭha's 17th century commentary as the most trustworthy guide for the exposition of the great epic. Sukthankar and other editors of the Critical Edition find commentaries to be the most useful device in textual criticism of the Mahābhārata. Nīlakaṇṭha's text has been used as the vulgate and the other commentaries have played an important role as testimonia while arriving at

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2 Holtzmann (1892) articulates these hypotheses, which have been mentioned by Sukthankar (1957: 14–16) and have been critically revisited and critiqued by Adluri & Bagchee (2014: 81–83), who offer a short summary of the hypotheses; Holtzmann has also referred to and critiqued in the Introduction and the first three chapters of the book.)

3 See discussion in Sukthankar (1957: 10–11) for a succinct summary of the takes on epic core, epic nucleus etc. Also see Adluri & Bagchee (2014: 61–62) for a discussion on the idea of nucleus and lack of uniformity of the epic in the view of European scholars.

the variant readings. Dandekar finds Devabodha's commentary to be far more superior than the Nīlakaṇṭha's for its precision and terseness. Dandekar (1951: i) holds,

> Unlike the other commentaries, the Jñānadīpikā is a concise *ṭīkā*: as a rule, it explains only the difficult words and passages in the text. But, occasionally it offers explanations of constructional obscurities and grammatical difficulties, and gives the gist of the passages; in the latter case usually, under the citation of entire verses (i.e. half *ślokas*) from the text.

Belvalkar, the Editor of the Bhīṣmaparvan notes striking agreement in Śārada and Kashmir manuscripts of the epic. While arriving at the constituted text of the epic, Devabodha's commentary came through as it held the Kashmir manuscript as its reference. Later scholarship has also understood the significance of the commentarial literature. Minkowski (2005: 229) lauds Nilakaṇṭha's commentary for its unique features, "it is used as a guide to difficult-to-read words and sentence. It serves as a trove of realia, of variant readings, of references to other commentators, of data about vernacular languages or of other archival features."

The commentaries have, thus, played a significant role in textual criticism of the Mahābhārata. The interpretative aspect of the commentaries though quite obvious and central to their being is yet understudied and, therefore, calls for the due attention. Before we turn to this hermeneutic task of commentaries let us discuss some common prejudices held about the commentaries.

1.2 *Some Common Prejudices about the Commentaries*

Common preconceptions regarding commentaries include the belief that they contain 'religious-biased emotions' or offer 'politically influenced explanations.' The commentators are also blamed for their lack of historical awareness and for uncritical interpretations reflecting the biases of their particular sect and period.[4] Minkowski (2005) brings forth the ambivalence regarding the

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4 Minkowski (2005) reports that Bopp did not agree with Nīlakaṇṭha's allegorical interpretations of the epic. The allegory is pronounced in the very name of the commentary – Bhāratabhāvadīpa, as though the bhava (roughly, the allegorical meaning) is being illuminated in the light (dīpa) of this commentary in Bhārata (the Epic). Making the assumption that Nīlakaṇṭha's views were representative of commentators generally, he deplored the lack of historical method he found in the "scholiast who uncritically interpret everything in the biases of their sect and time, and who treat language and myth in arbitrary fashion." The British Indologist John Muir remarks, "the narrator of the legend himself appears to have had no such idea of making it a vehicle of any vedantic allegory such as is here propounded". (Minkowski (2005: 227)).

commentary among the modern scholars. Here we offer a summary of some points articulated in his paper. Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary has received wide popularity on the one hand, but rejections and complaints, on the other, from the beginning of the Indological studies. The complaints frequently put forth are – sometimes he is very brief and sketchy, goes on length about clear points but falls silent on truly pesky verse, his text is harder than the base text, he has a penchant for anachronistic reading etc. These are precisely the prejudices which have delegitimized the native traditions of textual interpretations and replaced this textual scholarship by an alternative method called the 'historical-critical method'. While reflecting upon the social and intellectual consequences of this method, Adluri & Bagchee (2014: 149) maintain that "this method not only replaced the native traditions but created a false dichotomy of the rational, secular and progressive element of society versus the dogmatic, superstitious and conservative element".

Adluri & Bagchee (2014) have presented a critique of the historical-critical method and demonstrated that it entailed several problematic prejudices. This work has summarized presuppositions regarding the nature and function of this scholarship and the problems posited by this textual interpretation. A rejection of theology and philosophy, unbounded confidence in the historian's ability to recover an original, a rejection of Indian hermeneutics as uncritical, a claim to sovereignty over both text and tradition – these are the presuppositions which delegitimized an entire alternative tradition of hermeneutics. Although this method claimed to be universal or standardized, it is rather difficult to apply this method unanimously to any culture, since cultures are manifested as types. A scripture belongs to a particular cultural context and community.[5] The method developed for one culture cannot be blindly applied to other. Rather, it is significant to understand what kind of methodological apparatus has been developed by that particular culture to explain the text.

Recovery of the scriptures of the Semitic religions led to a certain historical-critical method. However, given that the critical edition of the Mahābhārata is now at our disposal, the interpretation of the entire epic should be the main concern. This paper attempts to explore the parallels between the scholarly methods of Nīlakaṇṭha, Devabodha and Vādirāja. One of the significant parallels is treating the epic as though it were a śāstra-text.

The prejudices held about the commentaries and the epic are, in a way, pre-empted as we learn that the commentators are reading the epic as a

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5 Legapsi has elegantly defined, "Scripture as a text that functions in an authoritative and obligatory way within a context of a community shaped by a coherent economy of meaning" (Adluri & Bagchee (2014: 372)).

dharmaśāstra text. This identification of the epic as a *dharmaśāstra* text offers a wider perspective and meaning of the epic, whereby the ideas like the epic being a battle-story or a mere squabble among the cousins over property inheritance appear to be trivial.

2   The Extent of the Commentaries

Adluri & Bagchee (2018) provide a comprehensive list of the available commentaries, based on the editors' comments in the respective *parvan*s. Our concern here is with the three commentaries: Devabodha's 11 CE commentary, the *Jñānadīpikā*; Vādirāja's 16 CE commentary, the *Lakṣyālaṃkāra*; and Nīlakaṇṭha's 17 CE commentary, the *Bhāratabhāvadīpa*.

Devabodha's commentary is available on the *Ādi, Sabhā, Virāṭa, Udyoga, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Sauptika, Strī, Anuśāsana,* and *Āśvamedhika parvan*s. The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute has published the commentaries on the Ādi (R.N. Dandekar), Sabhā (R.D. Karmarkar), and Bhīṣma *parvan*s (S.K. Belvakar) – See Belvalkar (1947); Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan has published the commentary on the Udyogaparvan (Ed. S.K. De) – See De (1944). Devabodha's commentary on the other *parvan*s is available in manuscript form. Leclere (2016) discusses Devabodha's probable socio-cultural milieu. Editors note the importance of Devabodha's work as the oldest extant commentary on the Mahābhārata.

Vādirāja's commentary *Lakṣālaṅkāra* or *Lakṣābharaṇa* is available on the *Ādi, Sabhā, Virāṭa, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Śalya, Sauptika, Strī, Śānti, Anuśāsana, Āśvamedhika, Āśramavāsika, Mausala, Mahāprāsthānika* and *Svargārohaṇa parvan*s. For this paper, we have examined the manuscript in the collection of the Bhandarkar Institute.

Nīlakaṇṭha's 17th-century commentary on all 18 *parvan*s was published by Chitrashala Press, but this edition is no longer in print. A newer edition printed by Naga Publishers, New Delhi is available. Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary is the most popular commentary among Indologists.

3   Principles and Purpose of the Commentaries

The opening sections of the commentaries are significant for they clarify the purpose and the way they approach the epic. It is through these sections that we learn about the hermeneutic engagement of the commentaries. It is interesting to note that the commentators connect the epic to the attainment of the fourfold *puruṣārtha*s which are central to the Indian way of life.

We cite from Devabodha (1100 CE):

> *na dṛṣṭa iti vaiyyāse śabde mā saṃśayaṃ kṛthāḥ.*
> *ajñairajñātam ityeva padaṃ na hi na vidyate.*
>
> Ādiparvan, verse 7

Construal: *na dṛṣṭa iti vaiyyāse śabde saṃśayam mā kṛthāḥ ajñaiḥ ajñātam ityeva padam na hi vidyate* [*iti*] *na.*

Translation:[6] Just because (you) did not see it, don't be suspicious about Vyāsa's word. It is not the case that the word does not exist because the ignorant are not aware of it.

We adopt Devabodha's method for examining the Mahābhārata text and propose an extension of this approach to contemplate the commentaries themselves. In essence, this entails that, regardless of occasional obscurity in the commentaries, they should not be hastily disregarded but rather should be engaged with in a spirit of scholarly inquiry to discern the commentators' underlying intentions.

> *yānyujjahāra māhendrāt vyāso vyākaraṇārṇavāt.*
> *śabdaratnāni kiṃ tāni santi pāṇinigoṣpade.*
>
> Ādiparvan, verse 8

Construal: *yāni śabdaratnāni vyāsaḥ mahendrāt vyākaraṇārṇavāt ujjahāra tāni pāṇinigoṣpade santi kim?*

Translation: The words that Vyāsa took from the oceanic grammar of Indra do not exist in the narrow grammar of Pāṇini.

This reveals Devabodha's second principle – he is discarding a word giving the usual excuse that this word is *apāṇinīya*, that is, it cannot be derived using Pāṇini's grammar. Rather, Devabodha claims that Vyāsa has taken his words from the grammar of Indra who is the earliest grammarian. Thus, the fact that some words from Vyāsa's text do not conform to Pāṇini does not really matter.

Devabodha uses the expression *ityalamativistareṇa* (enough of this expansion) only once in the remarks on the *maṅgalaśloka*. Leclere (2016) interprets this as an influence of dramatics. This precisely is his principle to be concise while writing the commentary.

The three verses at the beginning of *Ādiparvan* (6, 7, and 9) from Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary are extremely significant for understanding his textual method.

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6   The translations, unless otherwise mentioned, are our own.

In the 6th verse[7] he explains that he has collected manuscripts from different regions and has arrived at his reading having consulted the dictionaries. In the 7th verse[8] he explains the purpose (and the underlying principle) of his commentary. Whereas, "the other commentators are engaged in explaining the surface meaning of the text, this lamp (*bhāratabhāvadīpa*) is capable of illuminating the internal or hidden meaning of the text."

The 9th verse mentions the techniques that Nīlakaṇṭha used to interpret the text. To understand the meanings of stretched out verses, he has relied on the lexicon and grammatical analyses, he has resorted to abridgement for a handy grasp of the deeper meanings. The obscure and the obfuscated verses have been decoded. The phrase *nacchinnānatamaścarānanatatiḥ* is especially important for the meaning of the word *tamas*. *Tamas* means 'illusion' in Sāṃkhya philosophy.[9] In Sāṃkhya, one of the five forms of *avidyās* is *tamas*. It is also one of the *triguṇas* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. This is one small instance where we see how Nīlakaṇṭha brings in the *śāstrīya* or philosophical inputs to explicate the text under interpretation. Minkowski (2005: 239, fn. 48 therein), however, offers a meaning which is quite the opposite to what seems to be the intended meaning of the verse. We offer an alternative interpretation of the verse which we believe is more literal and closer to the author's intent. Furthermore, unlike Minkowski, this pre-empts any inputs brought in from Rāmāyaṇa. Following the verse, we reproduce Minkowski's interpretation and then offer our own construal and meaning.

> *uttāneṣviha kośavigrahabalaṃ padyeṣu naivāśritam*
> *gambhīreṣu na setavo na vihitāḥ kūṭā na nasphoṭitāḥ.*
> *nacchinnānatamaścarānanatatir bhaktā, na nāhlāditā*
> *nodīnā na vibhaṣaṇāśca vihitāḥ śrīlakṣmaṇāryāśritaiḥ.*
>
> Ādiparvan, verse 9

Interpretation in Minkowski (2005)

> I could not rely on the array of lexicon and grammatical analyses in ex-
> plicating the long verses; nor could I rely upon abridgements for the deep

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7 *bahūn samāhṛtya vibhinnadeśyān kośān viniścitya ca pāṭham agryam|*
   prācām gurūṇām anusṛtya vācam ārabhyate bhāratabhāvadīpaḥ|| (*Ādiparvan*, verse 6)

8 *ṭīkāntarāṇīnduraviprabhāni bāhyārtharatnāni cakāsayantu|*
   antarnigūḍhārthacayaprakāśe dīpaḥ kṣamo bhāratamandire'smin|| (*Ādiparvan*, verse 7)

9 *Tamas*: darkness, mental darkness, ignorance, illusion, error. *Tamas* means illusion or error in Sāṃkhya philosophy. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, it refers to one of the five *avidyā*s. *Tamas* is one of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) and it also means a cause of heaviness, ignorance, illusion, lust, anger, pride, sorrow and dullness (Williams n.d.).

verses, nor could I explicate knotty verses or subtle ones, nor were the broken verses, nor the obscure ones, nor the rare ones analysed, nor were the displeasing ones, nor the dispiriting ones, nor the frightening ones explained by me, except that I relied upon my guru Lakṣmaṇācārya.

MINKOWSKI (2005: 239)

Contrary to Minkowski's interpretation, we propose the following construal and meaning:

Construal: *śrīlakṣmaṇāryāśritaiḥ* (*asmābhiḥ, nīlakaṇṭhādibhiḥ*) *iha uttāneṣu padyeṣu kośavigrahabalaṃ na āśritaṃ, gaṃbhīreṣu setavaḥ na vihitāḥ* (*iti*) *na. kūṭā na sphoṭitā* (*iti*) *na. tamaścarānanatatiḥ na china* (*iti*) *na. bhaktāḥ na āhlāditāḥ* (*iti*) *na. dīnāḥ vibhīṣaṇāḥ ca na vihitāḥ* (*iti*) *na.*

Translation: Having taken refuge in *śrīlakṣmaṇārya* (Nīlakaṇṭha's guru), I have here relied upon lexicon and grammatical analyses of the stretched out (long) verses, I have made abridgements for the deeper meanings of the verses, I have analysed the complicated verses, I have broken up the verses which spread erroneous meanings (also I have tried to unfold the *sāṅkhya* interpretation of the text). The broken or scattered verses have been construed well (literally, have been made happy), the verses that appear to be horrifying, due to scanty and insufficient words, have been interpreted (by supplying the necessary words).

This verse is a collection of textual interpretation techniques in terms of lexicon, grammatical analysis, abridgement of verses (this is discussed as interpretation technique in the poetics), unfolding the philosophical meaning of the text. Providing interpretations for the scanty, insufficient verses is also discussed as a significant principle of *adhyāhāra* for textual interpretation.

4 The Structure of the Commentaries

Maṅgala is the benediction of a text. The purpose of this benediction is not just to invoke a revered deity but to unfold the subject-matter of the text. *Prayojana* is one of the important prerequisites of a *śāstra* text. It is one of the four *anubandhas* of a text. *Adhikārin* (seeker), *viṣaya* (subject matter), *prayojana* (goal or aim), and *sambandha* (connection) are the four prerequisites. *Phala* is a mutually embedded aspect of *prayojana*. If the text begins with the *prayojana,* then it concludes with a *phala*. The Sanskrit textual tradition has developed several devices to mark the beginnings and conclusions of the text. There are some very simple discourse markers like *atha* in the beginning and *iti* in the conclusion to very elaborate formal aspects

of drama like *nāndī* and *bharatavākya*. *Prayojana* and *phala* are central to the idea of sacrifice. The very subject matter of the *Brāhmaṇa* texts is *vidhi* (ritual) and *arthavāda* (interpretation), and therefore the texts invest in explaining and instructing the relevance of the Vedic rituals. Given this context, it is unsurprising that the texts often rationalise the series of rituals in the light of *prayojana* and *phala*. Winternitz, while elaborating upon the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, adds, "the sacrificer is told clearly what all advantages he can obtain through the various sacrificial rites in this life or after death" (Winternitz 1990: 175). The 'advantages' mentioned by Winternitz here are nothing but the *phala*s. These ritual-texts give speculative reasons for performing sacrifice. The *Saṃhitā*s of the Black Yajurveda also offer insights into *prayojana*. We extend the notions – *prayojana* and *phala* as (a) textual and functional devices that come through to understand the outline of the epic commentaries, and (b) a characteristic of the *dharmaśāstra* texts.

A sacrifice is defined by a desire or a goal which is called *prayojana*. *Phala* is an outcome or a consequence of performance of a sacrifice. In *svargakāmaḥ yajeta*, *svarga* or heaven is the aim of the sacrifice, and it is obtained as a *phala* on accomplishment of the sacrifice. These ritual aspects have been eventually developed as devices of textual interpretation. Thus, *prayojana* and *phala* (consequence or attainment) are important aspects of the text that contribute to its interpretation.[10] The commentators, particularly Nīlakaṇṭha, engage with the epic as though it is a *śāstra* text. And it is clear from the initial remarks on the *maṅgala* of the epic that methodological, and even structural apparatus that the commentators develop is akin to *śastrīya* exposition. A *śāstra* text is conventionally structured in an opening verse (the *maṅgala*), the four prerequisites (the *anubandhacatuṣṭaya*) and the fruition (*phala*). The commentators juxtapose these structural aspects of a *śāstra* text with the epic text.

Within the wider array of *Dharmaśāstra* texts, the epic has been identified as a *smṛti* text. The *smṛti* text has its constitutive features that are also evident in the epic text. A *smṛti* text is typically composed of (a) creation of the world (b) sources of *dharma* (c) the *dharma* of the four social classes (*varṇāśramadharma, yugadharma*) (d) law of *karma* (birth and rebirth). The

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10   *upakramopasaṃhārau abhyāsopūrvatā phalam. arthavādopapattī ca liṅgaṃ tātparyanirṇaye.* This kārikā is generally cited in the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* texts. It enlists six significators which come through while interpreting a text, those being namely: the beginning and the end, recurrence, novelty, fruition, illustration (so as to elucidate the intent through simile, illustration or metaphor etc.) and reasoning. Our prime concerns, the epic commentators here, are resorting to *prayojana* and *phala* which are akin to the six significators mentioned in this *kārikā*.

verses 1.1.27–49 of *Ādiparvan* are about the creation of the world. The verses 1.1.37–38 offer a beautiful illustration of creation and the deluge. Devabodha's commentary draws our attention to these verses. The verses 1.1.46, 1.1.52, 1.1.191, 1.1.192, and 1.1.199–210 of the Ādiparvan mention several *prayojanas* and the *phala* of reciting the Mahābhārata. The concluding section of the *Svargārohaṇaparvan* features *phala* verses (18.5.26–54). These equivalences to a *smṛti* text do not seem incidental and thus help us in interpreting the text indeed as a *smṛti* text.

5   Excerpts from the Commentaries

Mahābhārata begins with *maṅgalaśloka, nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya*. This is the *maṅgala* outside the constituted text. According to Devabodha, Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha there is another *maṅgala* performed by the *Sauti* before he begins to narrate the story (Ādiparvan 1.1.20–22). This is a significant observation given by all of the three commentaries because it reveals the awareness about embedded narrative structure. It is typical of *śāstra* texts to commence with a *maṅgala* verse. It is at once a cultural and a formal aspect of the *śāstra* texts and of the scriptures. Instead of focusing on the interpretation of *nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya*, we discuss the insights offered by the commentators before and after this *maṅgala*. In addition to the *maṅgala*, the four prerequisites (*anubandhacatuṣṭaya*) of a text represent another traditional system that characterises the text. These are the basic components which define the text.

5.1   *Devabodha*
After the *maṅgalaśloka*s and opening verses of the commentary, Devabodha opens the discussion with following remarks:

> *puruṣārthacatuṣṭayasādhanasya* (for attainment of the four goals in life) *brahmahatyādimahāpātakaprāyaścittasya* (for atonement of the sin caused by slaughtering a Brahmin) *mahābhāratādhyayanasya aṅgaṃ vidadhāti* (performs the *maṅgala*–as a part of reading the Mahābhārata) *nārāyaṇam iti* (*nārāyaṇam* etc.)[11]

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11   Devabodha has an elaborate commentary on *nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya,* the opening verse of the epic. However, the commentary is not quoted and translated here for it is out of the scope of this paper, because it does not offer any insights on *anubandhacatuṣṭaya*. The other two commentators too comment upon the opening verse of the epic, and we have similarly avoided quoting and translating those for the same reason.

Translation: The purpose of reading the Mahābhārata is attainment of the four goals in life and atonement of the sin caused by assassination of a Brahmin. Here, as a part of this text, *maṅgala* is performed.

Then, Devabodha interprets the *maṅgalaśloka* of the Mahābhārata and continues the discussion of the word *jaya*:

> *iti namaskṛtya jayaḥ* (word *jaya*) *paurāṇikānāṃ rūḍhyā*[12] (by the convention of *paurāṇikas*) *bhāratam* (*bhārata*) *ucyate* (is said to be); *svapakṣasthāpanayā* (by establishing own *pakṣa*) *parapakṣapratyākhyānaṃ* (overpowering the opposition) (is) *jayaḥ* (triumph, victory) *iti* (thus) (is the) *yogaḥ* (original meaning). *iha ca* (so here) *dharmārthakāmamokṣasthāpanayā* (by establishing *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa*) *adharmānarthākāmabandhānāṃ tatpratipakṣāṇāṃ* (opposition of that – *adharma, anartha, akāma* and *bandha*) *pratyākhyānam* (refutation) *iti* (this) *yogaḥ* (original meaning) *api* (also) *pratīyamānaḥ* (implicated) *na* (not) *hātum arhati* (worthy to be denied). *asya* (of this) *śāstrasya* (knowledge branch) *prekṣāvatpravṛttyaṅgaviṣayasambandhaprayojanāni* (subject matter, connection and purpose are part of a discerning onset) *jayasaṃjñāta* (from the term *jaya*) *upalabhyante* (have been obtained). *ata eva* (therefore) *adhikāribhedāt* (as the seeker varies) *prayojanabhedat ca* (as the purpose varies) *śāstrabhedaḥ* (the subject matter differs).

Translation: The word *jaya* in the benedictory verse means *bhārata* by the *paurāṇika* convention, but its original meaning is victory or triumph. So, one meaning of the word *jaya*, that is, the original meaning victory or triumph here, cannot be denied. (One arrives at the meaning by) refutation of the opposite i.e. *adharma, anartha, akāma* and *bandha* and by establishment of *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa*. It is through the word *jaya*, which opens the epic in a discerning way, that we arrive at the subject matter, connection and purpose. Therefore, the subject matter differs according to the seeker and purpose.

Thus, according to Devabodha's commentary, the text's *anubandhacatuṣṭaya* is as follows: (1) *sambandha* (connection): the word *jaya* connects the text with

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12   A word's meaning is obtained in two ways. The original or etymological meaning is called yoga. The meaning established by the customary usage is called *rūḍhiḥ*. Thus, Devabodha explains both the meanings of the word *jaya*.

Bhārata and all the four subject matters *dharmārthakāmamokṣa*; (2) *adhikārin* (seeker of knowledge): seekers of *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa*; (3) *viṣaya* (subject matter): *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa*; (4) *prayojana* (purpose): narrating *Bhārata*, according to *paurāṇika* convention; and, establishing *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa* by refutation of the opposite *adharma, anartha, akāma* and *bandha.*

Thus, Devabodha's argument on the *anubandhcatuṣṭaya* is based on simple *yathāsaṅkhya* which is represented by the following chart:
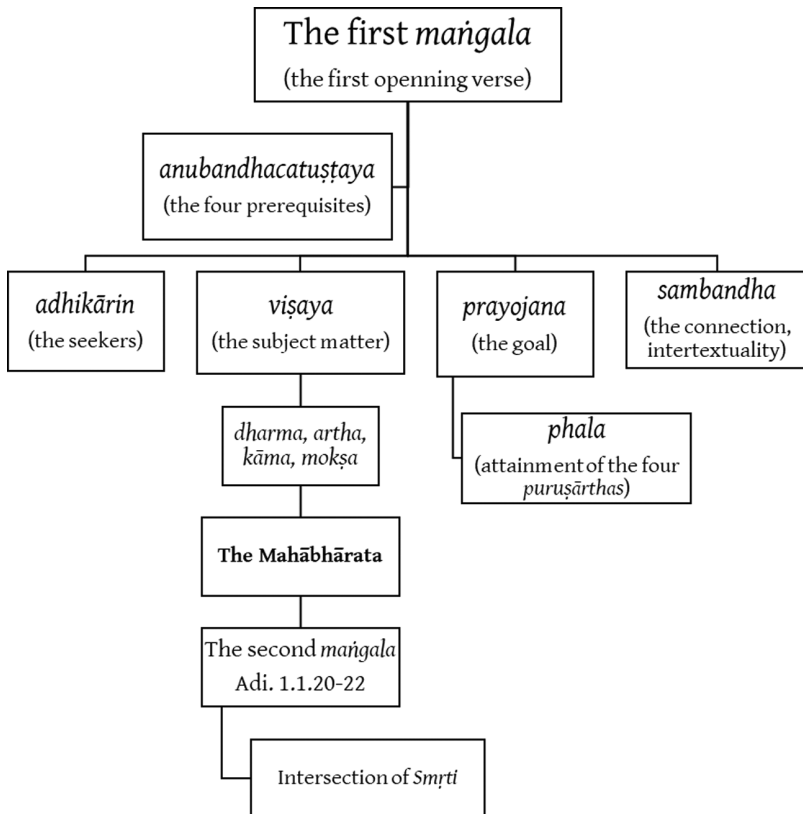
5.2 *Vādirāja*

Vādirāja's commentary on the *maṅgala* elaborates upon the term Vedavyāsa which has been used to refer to Vyāsa. As the traditional belief goes, Vyāsa has compiled the Vedas, and so has he authored the epic – Mahābhārata. Vādirāja builds on this belief and establishes a parallel that both the texts begin with a *maṅgala* verse. Juxtaposing the texts, in this way, on the basis of authorship

and the convention of beginning them with a *maṅgala* is an attempt to equate the texts and evoke a sense of equivalence and validation.

It should be noted, however, that there is a difference between the commentaries on *maṅgala* of Vādirāja and that of the other two commentators. Vādirāja's commentary on the *maṅgala*, given below, highlights the presence of a *maṅgala* for both the texts – the epic and the Vedas and the fact that the author and the compiler of the two is the same – Vyāsa. By contrast, the other two commentators articulate the *prayojanas* and *phalas*, right in the commentaries on the *maṅgala*.

Vādirāja's commentary on the *maṅgala* –

yo vedavyāsaḥ (The *Vedavyāsa* who) *agnimīḷe purohitam iti* (saying, I laud Agni, the chosen priest …) *agnistutirūpamaṅgalapūrvakaṃ* (performing a benediction by praising Agni) *Ṛgvedam uddhṛtavān* (extracted Ṛgveda) *yajamānasya paśūn pāhi*[13] (guard thou the cattle of the sacrificer) saying thus, *āśīrvādarūpaṃ maṅgalapūrvakaṃ* (the *maṅgala* seeking blessings) *yajurvedam uddadhāra* (elevated Yajurveda) *agna ayāhi vītaya iti devatāprār-thanarūpaṃ maṅgalapūrvakaṃ sāmavedam udadhre* (by saying, "come Agni praised with song, to feast the sacrificial offering", performing a *maṅgala* in the form of request to the revered deity, extracted the Sāmaveda) *śaṃ no devīrabhiṣṭaye iti*[14] (and saying be the divine waters weal for us in order to assistance …) *punarāśīrvādamaṅgalapūrvakaṃ* (once again performing a maṅgala in the form of benediction) *atharvavedam āvedayāṃ cakāra* (made known Atharvaveda) *sōyaṃ* (the same) *śiṣṭāgraṇīḥ bādarāyaṇaḥ* (*Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa* – superior among the elegant) *svayam antarāyavidhuropi* (he himself being free from anxiety caused by obstacle) *śiṣyān grāhayituṃ* (to bless his disciples) *mahābhāratākhyasya granthasya ādau* (in the beginning of the text named Mahābhārata) *vandanarūpaṃ maṅgalam ācarati* (performs a *maṅgala* in the form of benediction). *nārāyaṇaṃ suragurum iti.*

Translation: The Vedavyāsa who performed the benediction in the form of reverence to Agni saying, "laud Agni the chosen priest …", extracted Ṛgveda, saying, "guard thou the cattle of the sacrificer", performed the *maṅgala* in the form of benediction and elevated Yajurveda, by saying, "come Agni praised with song, to feast and sacrificial offering", performing a *maṅgala* in the form of request to the revered deity extracted the Sāmaveda, and saying, "be the

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13   Cf. Schroeder, Leopold von, ed, 1900. *Kāṭhakam: Die Samhita Der Kaṭha-śākhā*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.487463/mode/2up.

14   Cf. Ācārya, Śrīrām Śarmā, ed, 2005. *Atharvaveda Sanhitā* (with Hindi translation). Mathura, UP: Yug Nirmāṇ Yojanā, Gāyatrī Tapobhūmi. https://vedpuran.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/atharva-ved.pdf.

divine waters weal for us in order to assistance …" and performing a *maṅgala* in the form of benediction made Atharvaveda known. He, the Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa superior among the elegant ones, himself being free from anxiety caused by obstacles, performs a *maṅgala,* in the beginning of the Mahābhārata to bless his disciples.

These insights are significant for various reasons. By connecting the *maṅgala* of the Mahābhārata to the *maṅgala* of the Vedas, Vādirāja establishes a sense of parity between two texts and their authors. By doing so he underscores the relevance of the terms *'pañcamaveda'* or *'kārṣṇaveda'* conventionally used to refer to the epic. Vādirāja also offers a typology of the maṅgala, namely, invocation of a deity (*agnistutirūpamaṅgalapūrvakaṃ*), seeking blessings (*āśīrvādarūpaṃ maṅgalapūrvakaṃ*) and prayer (*devatāprārthanarūpaṃ maṅgalapūrvakaṃ*).

So far, we have seen views of Devabodha and Vādirāja. While the former envisages the epic text as a means to achieve the four *puruṣārtha*s, the latter evokes a sense of equivalence of the epic text to the Vedas. Let's see where does Nīlakaṇṭha pitch the epic text through its *maṅgala.*

5.3   *Nīlakaṇṭha*

While writing his commentary on the Mahābhārata's *maṅgalaśloka,* Nīlakaṇṭha begins with: *iha* (here) *khalu* (indeed) *bhagavān* (the revered) *pārāśaryaḥ* (son of the sage Parāśara, that is, Vyāsa) *paramakāruṇiko* (the one who is extremely compassionate) *mandamadhyamamatīn* (to the dull-witted and the mediocre/to the ignorant) *anugrahītuṃ* (to bless or to favor) *caturdaśavidyāsthānrahasyāni* (fourteen lores of knowledge) *ekatra* (at one place) *pradidarśayiṣuḥ* (desirous to reveal) *mahābhāratākhyam itihāsaṃ* (a *lokavṛtta* or history named Mahābhārata) *praṇeṣyan* (establishing) *prāripstitasya* (of the initiated) *granthasya* (text) *niṣpratyūhaparipūraṇāya* (for accomplishment without any obstacle) *pracayagamanāya ca* (and to achieve progress or growth) *kṛtaṃ maṅgalaṃ* (offered benediction) *śiṣyaśikṣāyai* (for the admonishment of the disciple) *ślokarūpeṇa* (in the form of verse) *nibadhnan* (composing) *arthāt* (that is to say) *tatra* (there) *prekṣāvat* (wise or learned) *pravṛttyaṅgam*[15] (part of the commencement) *abhidheyādi* (subject matter along with *prayojana*) *darśayati* (points out) *nārāyaṇamiti.*

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15   This compound can be split and interpreted in two ways: (1) *pravṛtteḥ aṅgam,* which means 'part of the beginning'; and (2) *pravṛttiḥ aṅgaṃ yasya tat,* meaning, '(the subject matter) of which pravṛtti is a part'.

Translation: Thus, here, indeed, Lord Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara, the one who is extremely compassionate and desirous to reveal all the fourteen lores at one place, establishes the *lokavṛtta* (history) named Mahābhārata; so as to bless the dull-witted or the mediocre. For accomplishment of the initiated text, without any obstacle and to achieve growth, he has offered the verse of benediction. He has composed it in the form of a verse for the sake of instruction to the pupils. To begin with a verse of benediction is indeed a sign of erudition and being cultivated. The sign also conveys the subject of matter of the text along with its objective.

The expression *mandamadhyamamatīn anugrahītum* is akin to an introductory *śāstra* text. The introductory text (*prakaraṇa-grantha*) of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, *tarkasaṃgraha*, opens as follows:

> nidhāya hṛdi viśveśaṃ vidhāya guruvandanam.
> bālānāṃ sukhabodhāya kriyate tarkasaṃgrahaḥ.

Translation: With the fond and revered reminiscence of the Lord of the world, and having bowed down to the masters, the text – *tarkasaṅgraha* is being composed for the ease of comprehension of the beginners.

Similarly, Nīlakaṇṭha's comment can be interpreted as identifying the epic as an introductory text to the fourteen lores meant for beginners [*mandamadhyamamati*s (= *bāla*s)].

Thus, according to Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary, the *anubandhacatuṣṭaya* of the text is as follows: (1) *sambandha* (connection): the words *caturdaśa-vidyāsthānrahasyāni* and *mahābhāratākhyam itihāsaṃ* locate the epic text in their wider intertextual context. The Mahābhārata is an *itihāsa* and connects itself with the domain of fourteen branches of knowledge. This involves generic identification of the epic text, that it is an *itihāsa*, and by adding that, Vyāsa unravels the secret of the fourteen branches of knowledge. The commentator – Nīlakaṇṭha is spelling out the epistemological location of the epic text. (2) *adhikārin* (seeker of knowledge): *mandamadhyamamatīn* (to the dull-witted and the mediocre) *anugṛhītuṃ* (to bless or to favor) – here, the commentary mentions who the seekers of this *śāstra* are. The target readers of the text are the common people who might not be well-versed in any branch of knowledge. (3) *viṣaya* (subject matter): *caturdaśavidyāsthānrahasyāni* (fourteen lores of knowledge) *ekatra* (at one place) *pradidarśayiṣuḥ* (desirous to reveal) – here, the commentary spells out what the subject matter of the text is; (4) *prayojana* (purpose): the same words in the commentary also convey the purpose of the text. It is to instruct the fourteen knowledge branches to pupils at one place.

After commenting on the *maṅgalaśloka*, Nīlakaṇṭha again systematically discusses four prerequisites.

evaṃ ca (Thus) *jīvāvidyākalpitatvāt* (being manifested by the being and avidyā, ignorance) *jagato mithyātvaṃ* (deceitfulness of the world) *brahamaṇaśca* (of the brahman) *tatra satā* (there) *sphūrtipradatvena* (being as an inspiration) *satyatvaṃ* (being eternal) *jīvasya tadabhinnatvaṃ* (unity of the being and the eternal) *ceti* (thus is) *viṣayaḥ* (the subject matter) *darśitaḥ* (revealed).

Translation: For the being (*jīva*) and nescience or knowledge of the illusory objects (*avidyā*) are fictitious, the world is a delusion. The Brahman being the source of inspiration (of knowledge) is True, and non-difference of the individual being (*jīva*) [from that of the Brahman] is revealed as the subject matter.

Thus, the subject matter of the text is the revelation of the deceitfulness of the world caused by ignorance and existence of the eternal as an inspiration; unity of the being with the eternal is the subject matter of the text.

Avidyānivṛttau (having abstained from ignorance) *takṛtasya prapañcasya* (abstaining the world manifested by ignorance) *traikālikabādhād* (and by the hindrances caused by three types of time) *ātyantikyanarthanivṛttiḥ* (the extreme abandonment of the worthless world) *prayojanam* (is the aim of the text).

Translation: Having abstained from ignorance, abstaining from the world manifested by ignorance, *avidyā* and by the hindrances caused by three types of time, the extreme abandonment of this deceitful world – (this) is the aim of the text.

arthāt (according to the matter of fact) *tatkāmo'dhikārī* (a person seeking this liberation is *adhikārin*) *granthasya uktaviṣayasya ca jñāpyajñāpakasambandha* (there is the connection in the form of matter worthy to be known and the text which makes it known. This is the connection between the said subject and this text) *iti ca darśitam* (this has been revealed).

Translation: According to the matter of fact, a person seeking this liberation is *adhikārin*, (there is the connection in the form of matter worthy to be known and the text which makes it known.) This is the connection between the said subject and this text, this has been revealed.

The excerpts above from the commentaries seem to be unanimously articulating the four prerequisites of the text, namely, the subject matter of the text, seeker, connection, and purpose. *Prayojana* or purpose being one prominent of these four, it would be useful to revisit the same in detail. The following section puts it together.

6   *Prayojana* and *phala* at a Glance

6.1   *Prayojanas* (*Aims*)

According to Devabodha, in the following we resume the aims of studying the Mahābhārata that we have already discussed above in the relevant section.

1.   Attainment of four ends in life.
2.   Atonement of the sins caused by slaughtering of a Brahmin.
3.   Narrating *Bhārata*, according to *paurāṇika* custom.

Besides these three aims, Devabodha, while commenting upon a verse from ādiparvan, asserts a couple of other aims of the epic. It is interesting to note that he unhesitatingly connects it to the meaning of the Vedas. By connecting the epic to the Vedas, the meaning of the Vedas gets strengthened.

4.   *Vedārthasya pratipattilāghavam* – Ascertainment of the meaning of the Vedas, respectful reception of the Vedas in the form of *Iitihāsa*.
5.   *Vedārthasya itihāsapurāṇābhyaṃ samupabṛṃhaṇam*[16] – Strengthening or completing *Vedārtha* by appropriate discourse, which has become inadequate pertaining to improper interpretations.

According to Nīlakaṇṭha following are the aims of studying the Mahābhārata

1.   Proposing fourteen lores of knowledge.
2.   Admonishing these knowledge branches, at one place for the convenience of the ignorant.
3.   Admonishment of Vyāsa's disciples.
4.   Abstaining from illusive world is *prayojana*.
5.   Liberation from ignorance (*mokṣa*).

6.2   Phala *and* Phalaśruti

In the previous section, we discussed what the *prayojanas* and *phalas* (attainment) of reciting the Mahābhārata ascertained by the Mahābhārata-commentaries are. There is a complete section on *phalaśruti* verses in the last *parvan, Svargārohaṇaparvan* (18.5.26–54). *Phala* as a part of ritualistic aspect is transformed into *phalaśruti*. The word *śruti* signifies *śravaṇa*. It indicates recitation of the text and listening to it. The *phalaśruti* is thus 'listening to the *phala*' or 'the *phala* of listening'. The advantages which were obtained by the performance of ritual can be obtained simply by reciting and listening to a recitation of the text. Obviously, if attainment of heaven is the consequence

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16   *Itihāsaḥ purāvṛttam. Purāṇam pañcalakṣaṇam. upabṛhaṇam arthāntarakalpanayā kṣīṇasya yathāvadvyākhyānena paripoṣaḥ* (Dandekar 1941: 13). We translate: *Itihāsa* means that what happened in the past. Purāṇa is that which possesses the five characteristics. Strengthening is complementing or supporting the weakened [meaning] with the help of the appropriate commentary by drawing a parallel meaning.

of the sacrifice, it can now be obtained just by reciting the text. Reich (2011: 10) discusses many textual strategies of closure in the Mahābhārata. After the end of the story (18.4.9) the text continues and discusses the fruition of reciting the text. Brockington (1998: 154–55) discusses the lateness of these layers in the narrative. Hiltebeitel (2011: 19–20) suggests that "ignoring the discussion of layers and interpolations, it is important to focus on their function. Their function is to call attention to the varied benefits of belonging to the epic's textual audience, its community of readers".

We offer a synchronic analysis of these varied benefits. They include purification of all sins, attainment of heaven, purification of the offenses committed by sense or mind, attaining prosperity, and obtaining victory. There are some more specific benefits such as an expectant woman who will obtain a son or an illustrious, fortunate daughter. One important *phala* of reciting this text is going beyond all desires (18.5.47–48). Following the path of *dharma* is the aim of life: other pleasures will come as consequence (18.5.49–51). It also has a promise of attaining supreme spiritual ability (18.5.53).

The *phalaśruti* verses reveal the threefold aspect of this epic – *pravṛtti, nivṛtti* and *bhakti.* The consequences listed herein can be classified for the three types of people, that is, those who pursue *pravṛtti,* those who pursue *nivṛtti,* and those who pursue *bhakti. Pravṛtti* is the highest involvement in worldly life. There is a set of *phalas* that is offered to *pravṛtti* followers, to be more precise, to individuals belonging to *Gṛhasthāśrama* (for the householder). For instance, Mahābhārata 18.5.36 claims that the manes of the person who makes the *brāhmaṇas* listen to this part of the text at the end of the *śrāddha* ritual would receive inexhaustible food and water.

This reveals the shift from *pravṛtti* to *bhakti.* The householder would perform a *śrāddha* ritual. But the performance of *śrāddha* ritual is not the only means to satisfy manes. Reciting this epic is also an important component of this performance. Simply by reciting this epic, he ensures that his manes receive inexhaustible food and water. *Prāyaścitta* is a kind of antidote to feelings of grief and guilt. For getting liberated from sins such as slaughtering a brahman one must recite the Mahābhārata.[17] As a text, the Mahābhārata is situated at the textual intersection of *smṛti, śāstra*, and literature, whereas, philosophically, it encompasses doctrines such as Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and elaborates on how to attain detachment and overcome all desires. These aspects are revealed by the *phalaśruti* of the text.

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17   It is interesting to note that this type of enlisting of the *phala*s is quite akin to the *phalaśruti*s offered in the *smṛti* texts. Such instances from the text of the epic, in a way, fortify the commentators' idea to approach the epic as a *dharmaśāstra* or a *smṛti* text.

Devabodha's commentary is not available on the 18th *parvan*. Nīlakaṇṭha does not elaborate on this aspect. Vādirāja's commentary is yet to be investigated.

7   Conclusion

We conclude this paper by highlighting some key takeaways and some overriding similarities in the attitude of the commentators in connection to how they view the epic text. One such similarity is applying the formal aspects of *śāstra* text like *maṅgala, anubandhacatuṣṭaya,* and *phala* to the epic. By doing so, the commentaries have developed a methodological apparatus to look into the text.

A key takeaway in connection to *prayojana* and *phala* is that these originated in the sacrificial science as ritualistic aspects which have eventually assumed textual functions, mainly to mark the beginning and closure. The ritualistic *phala* has been further transformed to *phalaśruti* and it has been used as a functional device for concluding a text.

Recitation and listening of the text became an equally important device alongside the rituals performed for attaining *phala.* This shift from ritual to narrative is precisely the attainment-made-easy for common people which is a basic underlying principle of *bhakti.* In case of the Mahābhārata, *phalaśruti* functions on the threefold narrative structure of the text, *pravṛtti, nivṛtti* and *bhakti.*

In Sanskrit, the word *śāstra* designates an authoritative text. When this tag is added to a text, it carries the expectation of learning and obeying the teachings of that particular text. When applied to a specific text, the term *śāstra* signifies a systematic organization of the text. The insights developed over the time are enveloped in this tag. A *śāstra* text not only features a systematic organization, but it develops its own devices and frameworks to put the subject matter in particular form. These frameworks eventually become the formal aspects of the text.

The commentators of the Mahābhārata have developed a method to investigate the text. They receive the text as a *dharmaśāstra* text. The previously mentioned prejudices in this paper, such as uncritical interpretations reflecting the biases of the particular sect and period that the commentators belonged to, can be reinterpreted as efforts by the commentators to recontextualize the epic text. That is to say that the commentators' biases are not necessarily detrimental, but rather an attempt to render the epic text more meaningful to their own audience. Careful investigation of the commentaries will unfold the

history of interpretation of the text. These diverse formulations can help us explore new possibilities of textual interpretation.

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