

Department of Aesthetics and Philosophy
School of Interdisciplinary Studies
EFL University

Course Title	A CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MAHABHARATA
Course Code	APH 242
Semester	I & III, August – December 2023
No. of Credits	5
Name of Faculty	Dr. SREEDHARAN. T.
Course Description	<p>No other text has survived the many historical vicissitudes of Indian civilisation as the <i>Mahabharata</i> has done. The epic story has overshadowed all other forms of human expression, and remained a product of extraordinary cultural significance. Since it came into being, it has survived through recitals, renderings, revisions, translations, poetry, and fiction; through adaptations in theatre and dance and through representations in sculpture, painting, cinema, TV, and digital media. What makes the <i>Mahabharata</i> an epic of timeless magic? And what accounts for its continuing influence on the psyche of millions of Indians? It is said that the Indian people do not regard the <i>Mahabharata</i> as a work of the past, but as a distinct way of perceiving that past. In other words, the <i>Mahabharata</i> is a way of seeing a past of many beginnings, where time in all its dimensions – cosmic, mythical, historical and psychological – fuse together. The Indian people’s obsession with Vyasa’s epic perhaps lies in its classification as <i>itihasa</i> (a record of things as they happened), whereas Valmiki’s epic poem is seen as (<i>maha</i>)<i>kavya</i> (poetry). Hence, it is not just an epic, it is also the nation’s “way of remembering.” Vyasa’s narrative holds together various traditions of memory – myth, legend, history – without ever making explicit assertions about any. In the vastness of its frame, it provides a richness of narrative detail and moral ambiguities. It isn’t uncommon in India to often come across people from a diversity of backgrounds and cultural and linguistic heritage, who have their own version of the <i>Mahabharata</i>, their own interpretations and adaptations, which they apply to</p>

contemporary life, as a template for dilemmas and paradoxes, conflicts and resolutions.

The course will attempt to look at some of these questions: What does this vast mass of literary depiction intend to do? What is the epic's purpose? What is it really about? In what ways can we connect the philosophical and literary themes of the epic to India's history and culture? What are the principles, problems, and processes that animate the social, the cultural, the moral and the aesthetic of the epic? And, most of all, what is the reason for its unrivalled hold on the subconscious of millions of its readers through vastly different cultural epochs?

COURSE OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course the learners will be able to:

- To develop analytic and critical thinking skills, to read the text carefully paying attention to literary form, structure, context, and nuance. To research secondary sources, and to reconstruct an argument in their own language.
- To critically engage with the text from a variety of interdisciplinary approaches such as philosophy, literary theory, and cultural studies.
- Analyse various interpretations of the text: Western and traditional, and negotiate interpretations that clarify the relationship of the text to classical and contemporary Hinduism.
- To synthesise creative interpretations of the text, while adapting these interpretations to contemporary concerns and critical issues.
- To see how the text holds within its strands of Indian thought, from *achar* (convention) to *vichar* (questioning and self-enquiry).
- To understand the regional adaptations and versions of the epic: their relevance and implications.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To see how studying myths help us to understand archetypal patterns that recur in diverse landscapes, historical epochs, cultures, and narratives. <p>SELECT READING</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chaturvedi Badrinath. <i>The Mahabharata: An Inquiry in the Human Condition</i>. 2. S.P.Gupta and K.S.Ramachandran. <i>Mahabharata, Myth and Reality: Differing Views</i>. 3. Lisa Lias. <i>Issues of Identity in the Mahabharata</i>. 4. Brian Black. <i>In Dialogue with the Mahabharata</i>. 5. Nikhil Govind. <i>The Moral Imagination of the Mahabharata</i>.
Evaluation Scheme	<p>Internal Assessment: 40%</p> <p>Assignments / Open book examination (40 marks)</p> <p>Final Assessment: 60%</p> <p>Assignments / Open book examination (60 marks)</p>
Timing Venue	<p>Tuesday and Thursday 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm</p> <p>Room 2, Ground Floor, NAB</p>