

DEPARTMENT OF AESTHETICS AND PHILOSOPHY

THE ENGLISH AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES UNIVERSITY, HYDERABAD

Course title	A CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MAHABHARATA
Category	Existing course with revision. (20%)
Course code	MAAPHE 501
Semester	I & III, August – December 2025
Number of credits	Semester I – 4 credits, Semester III – 5 credits
Maximum intake	30
Day/Time	Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 am to 11:00 am
Name of the teacher/s	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 Mahabharata 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 Mahabharata as a work of the past, but as a distinct way of perceiving that past. In other words, the Mahabharata 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 Mahabharata, their own interpretations and adaptations, which they apply to contemporary life, as a template for dilemmas and paradoxes, conflicts and resolutions.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">The course will attempt to look at some of these questions: What</p>

	<p>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?</p> <p>LEARNING OUTCOMES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <i>achar</i> (convention) to <i>vichar</i> (questioning and self-enquiry). • To understand the regional adaptations and versions of the epic: their relevance and implications. • To see how studying myths help us to understand archetypal patterns that recur in diverse landscapes, historical epochs, cultures, and narratives.
Course delivery	Lecture and discussion
Evaluation scheme	<p>Internal Assessment: 40%</p> <p>Written examination (40 marks)</p> <p>Final Assessment: 60%</p> <p>Written examination (60 marks)</p>
Reading list	<p>Essential reading</p> <p><i>The Essential Mahabharata.</i></p> <p>Additional reading</p> <p>1. Chaturvedi Badrinath. <i>The Mahabharata: An Inquiry in the Human</i></p>

	<p><i>Condition.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. In Dialogue with the Mahabharata. 5. Nikhil Govind. The Moral Imagination of the Mahabharata.
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Course title	KEY CONCEPTS AND PERSPECTIVES IN AESTHETICS AND LITERARY THEORY
Category	Existing course with revision (20%)
Course code	MAAPHE 550
Semester	I & III, August – December 2025
Number of credits	Semester I – 4 credits, Semester III – 5 credits
Maximum intake	30
Day/Time	Monday and Wednesday 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Name of the teacher/s	Dr. SREEDHARAN. T.
Course description	<p>Every day we perform countless acts of reading, writing, interpretation, and evaluation. At its most basic level, literary theory provides an opportunity to slow down and to reflect upon these activities. Literary theory provides a vocabulary and tools for thinking about reading, writing, and criticism, both for everyday acts of evaluation and more academic studies of literature and culture.</p> <p>The practice of literary theory became a profession in the 20th century, but it has historical roots as far back as ancient Greece (Plato and Aristotle), ancient India (Bharata), and ancient Rome (Horace and Longinus). In the course, we will study some of the major concepts, issues and perspectives from the classical times to the present so as to gain an understanding of the different theoretical conceptions and methodologies that have shaped our understanding and appreciation of art and literature.</p> <p>The course will focus on literary theory, aesthetics, and criticism; that is, on theoretical and critical issues related to language, beauty, literature, writing, and interpretation. A cornerstone of literary theory is a belief in the cultural construction of knowledge. In the process of studying literary theory and using it to make arguments, we can hone our argumentative and critical thinking skills, learn about different</p>

	<p>thinkers, cultures and historical periods, and examine ongoing debates about key issues. Such a study should enable us to become more informed about the nature and function of theory, and to become aware of our own theoretical presuppositions and dispositions. It should also enable us to look at more specific issues, such as art and knowledge, art and emotion, art and culture, and also to examine the points of convergence and divergence in literary/critical/aesthetic thought.</p> <p>LEARNING OUTCOMES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore applications of critical theory to various literary texts. • To identify, speak and write about genres, forms, periods, movements and conventions of writing as well as the ability to understand and engage with literary-critical concepts, theories and categories. • To situate one's own reading, to be aware of one's position in terms of society, religion, caste, region, gender, politics, and sexuality, to be self-reflexive and self-questioning. • To understand the interconnections that exists between the ways of the word and the ways of the world, to think critically and clearly about the dialectics that exist between the verbal, the local and the global. • To see and respect difference and to transcend binaries.
Course delivery	Lecture and discussion
Evaluation scheme	<p>Internal Assessment: 40%</p> <p>Written examination (40 marks)</p> <p>Final Assessment: 60%</p> <p>Written examination (60 marks)</p>
Reading list	<p>Select Reading</p> <p>Steven M. Cahn, et al. (Ed.). <i>Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology</i>.</p> <p>Richard J. Lane (Ed.). <i>Global Literary Theory: An Anthology</i>.</p> <p>Vincent B. Leitch (Ed.) <i>The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</i>.</p> <p>S.S. Barlingay. <i>A Modern Introduction to Indian Aesthetic Theory</i>.</p> <p>Wilfred. L. Guerin. <i>A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature</i>.</p> <p>Herman Rapaport. <i>The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods</i>.</p> <p>Michael Groden, et al. (Ed.). <i>The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary</i></p>

	<p><i>Theory and Criticism.</i></p> <p>M.A.R. Habib. <i>A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present.</i></p> <p>Ramen Selden, et al. <i>A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Theory.</i></p> <p>G.N. Devy. <i>Indian Literary Criticism.</i></p>
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