Chapter II

Classification of Episodes

The Mahābhārata consisting of over 100,000 Slokas and comprising as it does, eighteen Parvas beginning with Ādi Parva and ending with Savargarohaṇa Parva—is the longest epic poem that has ever existed, about eight times the combined length of the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' colossal is size as in thought, this Indian epic is a treasury of knowledge and wisdom. Besides being a repository of the wisdom of ancient India, this epic of epics deals with India's cultural moorings, examines ancient India's philosophical systems and thinking processes, and, above all, records the pinnacle of knowledge known to the world in all its ramifications.

Vaṭakkumkul Rājarāja Varma(1) the profound scholar and Malayali writer) has expressed the opinion that the Mahābhārata has in it one thousand episodes- narratives of secondary nature. The majority of the episodes are long and exceptionally excellent and as large as life; a good many of them are comparatively short. The episodes, whether long or short, are obviously intended to serve as illustrative examples of moral aspects. They make understanding of the moral percepts quite easy to the leader, however intricate or involved they may be.

Although some historians opine that there are nearly One thousand episodes, there are only fiftynine (2) episodes in the Mahābhārata, which can be titled under upākhyānās. In the Critical edition of the Mahābhārata the number has been limited to fiftynine according to the strict definition of episodes. Actually, the name upākhyānas is clearly intended for a narrative purely episodic, e.g. Yayātyupākhanam, Sakuntalopkhyānam, etc.
What is an upakhyāna?

While making an analysis of all the titles that occur in the Mahābhārata (especially in the Śānti and Anuśāsana Prava) one can find that the most commonly used titles are ākhyānas Upakhyaṇas Samvādās, and the like. In the whole bulk of the Mahābhārata, only a few portions are called by the term Gītā. Such portions are termed ākhyānās and upākhyānās. This titles are self-explanatory since they deal with the story of somebody or some part incident. In the chapter entitled Samavāda and Gītā, Conversation takes place between two persons, where in the advice is given by the more competent person in answer to the questions put forward by deserving disciples. The main difference in that the Samavāda always quotes from the ancient stories which must have been handed down by tradition and mostly well-known even during the time when they were quoted, while the episodes sometimes give the instructions directly as in the BhagavadGītā. Some episodes, like Samvādās were handed down by tradition but most probably in the form of song through well-known sages or persons of high and renowned authority. Hence some episodes like those of Vasiṣṭha, Viswāmitra, Agastye and Cyavana, are called after the sages. It is further worthy that the title of the chapter differs according to the different recensions. The Dhamavāṭadhopākhana is also called Brāhmaṇavyāda Īśa Samvada.

Derivation of the word Upākhyāna

The word Upākhyāna or episode means a subordinate tale or story, an episode. The following one the available definitions of 'Upākhyānam' Monier Williams (3) derives it from upa+a+khyāna+am. Wilson (4) defines it as a tale or narrative, and derives the word from upa+akhyāna. According (5) to Apte, it is: 1. A Short tale or narrative, an episode. A Naciketam upākhyānam mṛtyuproktam sanātanam.
2. Repitition of a story already heard from others. Upākhyānam vina tavat bharatam procyade budhaih. Thararath Bhattacharya derives it from upa+a+khya+lyut.

Parvās and episodes of the Mahābhārata

The episodes in each parva of the Mahabharata are as follows

1.  
   **Adi Parva**
   
   It contains eight episodes or upākhyānās they are:-

   1. 'Sakuntalopākhyāna  62-69
   2. Yayātyupākhyāna  70-80
   3. Tāpatyopākhyāna  160-163
   4. Vasiṣṭhopākhyāna  164-168
   5. Aurvopākhyāna  169-173
   6. Pancendropākhyāna  189
   7. Sundopasundopākhyāna  20.1-204
   8. 'Sārűgakopākhyāna  220-225

II.  
   **Sabha Parva**
   
   This parva contains no episodes.

III.  
   **Vana Parva**
   
   It is a veritable treasure of ancient brāhmanic myths and legends. This parva contains Sixteen episodes. They are:-

   9. Saubhavadhopākhyāna  15-23
   10. Nalopākhyāna  50-78
   11. Agastyopākhyāna  93-102
IV. Virāta Parva

This book contains no episodes. In this Parva the narrative is plain and straightforward, unembellished by any episode enlargement and the story marches rapidly forward.

V. Udyoga Parva: This Parva contains only two episodes. They are:-

25 Indravijayopākhyāna 9-18
26 Ambopākhyāna 170-196

VI. Bhīśma Parva

27 Viswopākhyāna 34

VII. Drona Parva No episodes secure in this section.
VIII. **Karna Parva**  
It contains the following episodes.

28 Tripuravadhopākhyāna  24
29 Hamsakākīyopākhyāna  28

IX. **Salva Parva**  
It has a sub-parva called Tirthayātrā Parva.

It contains four episodes.

They are:

30 Tritopākyāna  35
31 Srucāvatypākhyāna  47
32 Jaigīśavyopākhyāna  49
33 Vṛdhakanyopākhyāna  51

X. **Sauptika Parva**  
No episodes are obtained in this Parva.

XI. **Stri Parva**  
Here also, no episodes occur.

XII. **Śanti Parva**  
This Parva has three sub-Parvas. The first is Rajadharma or the King's duties. This contains seven episodes.

34 Śankha likhitopākhyāna  24
35 Hayagrīvopākhyana  25
36 Śodasaśajākīyopākhyāna  29
37 Suvarṇastāryupakhyana  31
38 Jāmadagnyopākhyāna  49
39 Mucukunodopākhyāna  75
40 Kalakavṛkṣiyopākhyāna  83

*The second sub Parva, i.e., Apaddharma Parva contains...*
two episodes. They are:

41 Kṛtaaghnagautamopākhyāna
42 Jāpakopākhyāna

*The third sub-Parva*, ie, Mokṣa dharma Parva contains three episodes.

43 Cirakāriko pākhyāna 258
44 Kundadhāropākhyāna 263
45 Kavyopākhyana 278
46 Uccabṛtyupākhyana 340-353

XIII. *Anuṣāsana Parva*. This Parva contains ten episodes

47 Sudarśanopākhyāna 2
48 Viswamitrōpākhyāna 3-4
49 Bhangasvanopākhyāna 12
50 Upamanyūpākhyāna 14-17
51 Mātangopākhyāna 28
52 Vītahavyopākhyāna 31
53 Vipulopākhyāna 40-43
54 Cyavanopākhyāna 50
55 Nṛgopākhyāna 70
56 Nāciketopākhyāna 71

XIV. *Aswamedhika Parva*. This Parva supplies three episodes

57 Kīdopākhyāna 118-120
58 Uttankopākhyāna 52-57
59 Nakulopākhyāna 91-96
There are no episodes in the last four Parvas mentioned below

XV. Āśramavāśkika Parva
XVI. Mausala Parva
XVII. Mahāprasthānika Parva
XVIII. Svāgārohana Parva

Vātakkumkur Rajarajavarma arranges the episodes under three heads, depending on their largeness and nature—

Brhat (Major), Madhyama (Middling) and Laghu (minor)

**Brhat upakhyanas (Major episodes)**

Plentiful are the episodes which reach epic proportion. Episodes like

1. Yayāṭupākhyāna 70-80
2. Nalopākhyāna 50-78
3. Agastypākhyāna 93-102
4. Ramopākhyāna 258-276
5. Indravijayopākhyāna 9-18
6. Ambopakhyāna and 170-196
7. Ucchabṛtyapākhyāna 350-353 come under the first head—Brhat. Each of them contains many chapter and describes a long story in a detailed, comprehensive way. The most important of them include Rāmopākhyāna, Nalopākhyāna, Ambopākhyāna, which are all noted for their largeness and element of interest

**Madhyama Upākhyānas (middling episodes)**

To the second type episodes containing less than ten chapters they are:-
### A. Adiparva

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### B. Vana Parva

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<td>Ṛṣyasṛṅgopākhyāna</td>
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<td>Kartavīryopākhyāna</td>
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<td>14</td>
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### C. Santiparva

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Laghu or Minor episodes

Now we come to the third category of episodes namely Laghu or minor. Among these episodes are found stories of passing interest, stories narrated for the occasion what may be called invented stories. Each of them contains only one chapter, and they are all classified under the head of Laghu. The special quality of these episodes depends, to a large measure, upon that of the moral precepts they seek to exemplify and extol.

1. Pancendropākhyāna 189
2. Jantupākhāyāna 128
3. Matsyopākhyāna 185
4. Mandūkopākhyāna 190
5. Indradyumnopākhyāna 191
6. Viswopākhyāna 34
7. Tripuravadhopākhyāna 24
8. Hamsakākīyopākhyāna 28
9. Tritopākhyāna 35
10. Srucāvatyupākhyāna 47
11. Jaigeesavyopākhyāna 49
12. Vṛddhakāyopākhyāna 51
13. Sankhalikhitopākhyāna 24
14. Hayagrīvopākhyāna 25
15. Šodasārājakīyopākhyāna 29
16. Suvarṇastīvyupākhyāna 31
17. Jāmadagnyopākhyāna 49
18. Mucukundopākhyāna 75
19. Kālakavyrkṣyopākhyāna 83
20. Cīrkārikopākhyāna 258
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The greatest importance goes to the legends or old stories handed down from the past and passed on to successive generations through oral and at great length. There legends of old are informative and delightful; they produce an impression similar to that of stories, both long and short. It is they which make the Mahābhārata what it is and enchaince its usefulness.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. VaṭakkumkuṟRājaraja Varma, Mahābhārata Pravesika P.107
3. H.H Wilson, A Sanskrit, English Dictionary P.131
4. Vaman Sivaram Apte, Sanskrit English Dictionary P. 470
5. Thranadh Bhattacharya, Sabdastoma Mahanidhi