



# Life and Philosophy of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa: The Chronicler of the *Mahābhārata*

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## Abstract

Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa, popularly known as Veda Vyasa, is regarded to be the greatest seer of ancient India. He was an erudite scholar. He is credited with writing the epic *Mahābhārata* and dividing the Veda into four texts. Unlike other texts, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa also features as an important character in the *Mahābhārata*. He is believed to be the grandfather of the main protagonists of the epic. His character in the *Mahābhārata* shows that he is supremely wise. Vyāsa lived around the 3rd millennium BCE. There are references in the epic and the *Purānas* to the fact that Vyāsa lived at the close of the *DvāparaYug* (era). The festival of *Guru Purnima* is dedicated to him. Indian mythology says that 'Vyāsa' is not a particular person's name. It is the name given to a compiler. It is thus evident that there were compilers of the Veda who preceded Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. However, as mythical as it may be, the chronicler of the *Mahābhārata* is the twenty-eighth Veda Vyāsa to be succeeded by Droni (*Ashwathāma*) in the forthcoming *Dvāpara Yug*. In the *Mahābhārata*, Vyāsa was worshipped as an incarnation of Brahmā, Narayana Vishnu and Maheshwara. Thus, the life of this great saint of ancient India is mired in many myths and realities, some of which are difficult to retrieve from the hold of time. The present study is an attempt to discern myth from reality and to draw a comprehensive sketch of the life and philosophy of the mystic based on the epic *Mahābhārata*.

**Keywords:** Vyāsa, Sanatana Dharma, Mahābhārata, Shanti Parva, myth, Karma

## Introduction

Veda Vyāsa is known to be the greatest saint of ancient India and has been adored throughout the ages for his profound contribution to the ancient Indian literature and civilization. He is recognized mainly as the author of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>1</sup>. But apart from compiling the *Mahābhārata*, Veda Vyāsa made significant contributions to the compilation of numerous other authoritative religious texts of ancient India. ‘He is traditionally credited with the arrangement of the *Vedas* into four texts, as well as the composition of the epic *Mahābhārata* (MBh), many *Purānas*<sup>2</sup> and other works’ (Sullivan, 1994 a, p. 377). There is literature that suggests that the *Brahmā Sūtras*<sup>3</sup> is also the compilation of Veda Vyāsa:

The ‘*Brahmā Sūtras*’, also called *Vedānta Sūtras* were composed by Sage Krishna Dvaipayana Veda Vyāsa, also known as Badarayana, believed to be the very incarnation of the Supreme Being. They form along with the Upanishads and the Srimad Bhagavad-Gita, as the core shell of *Sanātana Dharma* as present in the Vedas. This triad of sacred scriptural texts is revered and termed as ‘*Prasthanā-Trayee*’ or the three pillars of spiritual wisdom (*BrahmāSūtras*-Ancient Indian Wisdom, 2015).

It may be presumed without much ado that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa was an erudite scholar and prolific author. He made substantial contributions to the majority of the ancient Indian writings that are still in use today, helping to establish *Sanātana Dharma* as an inclusive polytheistic religion.

## Early Life

Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa was believed to be the son of the great ancient Indian saint Parāśara and his wife Satyavati. The tale goes that his mother Satyavati gave him birth almost effortlessly, “He was conceived and born the same day, spending only a minimum time in the womb. Satyavati does not nurse him or rear him to adulthood. He reaches maturity by his own mettle, independent of the nurturing hands of the women” (Dhand, 2004 a, p.44). Immediately

following his birth, Vyāsa took refuge in the woods and spent his life in deep meditation.

He lived as a hermit (*Vyāāsamuni*) until he was called by his mother to beget sons for the widows of her son Vicitravîrya who died childless. It is said that Vyāsa made a demand before begetting children, “When first solicited for his favour by Satyavati, Vyāsa demands that the two women should undertake a yearlong vow of self-purification” (Dhand, 2004 b, p.44). Vyāsa did not provide his mother an explanation for the condition but made it imperative for the ladies to live a restrained life for a year to be blessed with motherhood by him. At the end of the year-long process of self-purification, Vyāsa met with the two widows, Ambikā first and then Ambālikā a year later. He pierced through their wombs with his *yogic*<sup>4</sup> power to impregnate them. But this whole *yogic* process was not quite easy for the two women. Ambikā closed her eyes during the *yogic* union due to his awful look and corresponding dark complexion. Vyāsa looked like *Bhairava*<sup>5</sup> to her. Vyāsa foresaw the possibility that the child would be born blind and cautioned Satyavati of the likely outcome. Later, this child was named Dhrtarāstra who was stone-blind since his birth.

A year later, Satyavati advised Ambālikā to maintain calm and warned her of the consequences that might entail otherwise. But during conception, Ambālikā also felt similarly scared to encounter the swarthy saint. Nonetheless, she did not close her eyes but turned pale out of fear instead. Her child, later known as Pāndu, was anaemic and pale. As predicted by the saint, both women ended up with children who had congenital defects. In order to ensure that a healthy child would be born and be able to carry on the Bharatha dynasty's tradition, Vyāsa left for *Tapobon* (a tranquil meditation retreat in the woods) and came back to satisfy Satyavati's wish to give the family an heir as powerful as a *Gandharva*<sup>6</sup>. He advised Satyavati to send one of the sisters-in-law again. But Satyavati's daughters-in-law did not dare to face their previous exalted partner yet again and sent one of their beautiful *dasis* (maid) in disguise. The maid took a detached stance and maintained her composure throughout the interaction. The result was that the maid was able to conceive a healthy child and gave birth to Vidura without having to go through the year-long procedure of self-purification. Unlike

Dhrtarāstra and Pāndu, Vidura was the embodiment of knowledge, morality, and intellect in the *Mahābhārata*. That is how Veda Vyāsa became the biological father of three famous sons, all of whom happened to be important characters in the *Mahābhārata*.

Prior to these three children, Veda Vyāsa became the father of Śuka who was born of his union with the beautiful *apsara* (celestial nymph) Ghritachi<sup>7</sup>. As the legend goes, Veda Vyāsa was born circa 3rd millennium BCE. He was born on an island in the river Yamuna close to the city of Kalpi in Uttar Pradesh. Vyāsa is believed to have lived on the banks of the river Ganga which passes through Uttarakhand. Veda Vyāsa was the disciple of great saints like Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana, and Sanat Kumāra<sup>8</sup>. Their teaching is reflected in the *Mahābhārata* and the Bhagavad-Gita (*Sanath Kumaras/Saints of India/Hindu Scriptures*, 2019). As claimed in Indian mythology, Vyāsa learned different things from different entities. “Puranas say that Vyasa took initiation at the hands of his twenty-first Guru (Teacher), sage Vasudeva. He studied the Shastras under sages Sanaka and Sanandana and others” (*Hindupedia*). He was thus able to achieve a high level of knowledge under the guidance of the most knowledgeable masters:

Vyāsa was considered as a cosmic entity born again and again to arrange and promulgate the scriptures...As the author of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh), he was considered as one of the two eyes<sup>9</sup> of men, the promulgator of *dharma's* teachings and the resurrector of *dharma* in each of the yugas...Because Vyāsa was said to have narrated the eighteen Purānas, Vyāsa meant also a Brahmān who recited and expounded the Purānas in public. Since he was stationed originally in Vārānasi, everyone was supposed to go there, live in the holy city and listen to his recital. Vyāsa was also supposed to be the author of *Vyāsa-smṛiti*, *Vyāsa-gītā* and *Kūrma-purāna*, various stotras, and the *Yogabhāṣya*. He was also considered to be the founder and the expounder of the Vedānta philosophy (Sternbach, 1974 a, p. 107-108).

It is thus comprehensible from the frequent references available in ancient scriptures that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa was a highly learned saint of ancient India with extraordinary life and works.

### Myth and the Reality

Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa lived roughly five thousand years ago. He was considered to be born on the day of *Guru Purnima* (the full moon day). This day is also called '*Vyāsa Purnima*', "This is the *Vyāsa Purnima*, as it is called usually, dedicated to the great Vyasa, and incidentally dedicated to all the Gurus because of the fact that Vyasa is considered as the Guru of all Gurus" (Krishnananda, 2021 a, p. 9-10). As a thinker of the remote past, the life of this saint of ancient India is presented as a blend of myths and reality. Nonetheless, a dispassionate analysis of facts may help in discerning between myth and reality to a certain extent. A sizable section of existing literature attributes the authorship of most of the ancient scriptures to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa. The list includes the *Mahābhārata*, the *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita*, the eighteen *Purānas*, the *Brahmā Sūtras* and several other works along with the arrangement of the four Vedas. However, an objective assessment of his works is obvious to cast doubt on the veracity of the claim as it is difficult for one person to accomplish these extensive texts dealing with numerous subject matters in one span of life. Scholars from the West consider the works ascribed to Vyāsa as texts composed over time by different individuals. The authorship conferred upon Vyāsa is "symbolic" in nature: "For the Hindu tradition, religious authority is often personal, embodied in the figure of the guru, and Vyāsa stands at the head of the chain of teachers (*guru-paramparā*) as the originator and authenticator of these teachings" (Sullivan, 1994 b, p.377).

If Vedic evidence is to be believed, Vyāsa had nothing to do with the four Vedas,

'It is impossible to imagine that these works are later than the *Mahābhārata*, or that personages like Nārada mentioned in them, are posterior to Vyāsa. Evidently, therefore, the three Vedas existed long before the Epic period...Nor is there the slightest hint in any of the

Vedic works to prove anything like a division of the Vedas. Then there is, again, the most glaring contradiction in the Epic itself, where its author is credited with that glorious work. First it is stated that he studied the Vedas (mark the plural); and then next comes the amazing statement that he divided the original Veda (observe the singular) into four!’ (Shembavnekar, 1946 a, p.116).

The Yuktidīpikā, the most authoritative commentary on classical *Sāṃkhya*’s origin of the Vedas, also does not attribute the authorship of the text to Vyāsa, “The Yuktidīpikā is the first text in the classical Sāṃkhya tradition to state directly that the Vedas have no author” (Lucyszyna, 2020). Just as the authorship of the Vedas is shrouded in obscurity, the authorship of the *Brahmā Sūtras* is also unresolved.

On the assumption of the identity of Badarayana with Vyāsa, the chronological tangle becomes even more complicated. For, the former refers not only to the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad in which Yājñavalkya so prominently figures, but also to its two recensions viz., Kānva and Mādhyandina. Evidently, therefore, the author of the *Brahmā-sūtra* lived centuries after the great sage, who started a new school of the Yajurveda (Shembavnekar, 1946 b, p.120).

The myth further elevates Vyāsa to the status of God. Hindus regard Vyāsa as an incarnation of *Narayana Vishnu*. The *Purānas* have personified him as the *Narayana Vishnu* in a number of allusions. He was also mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as a living embodiment of *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Maheshwar* without having four faces, four hands, and without the sign of the moon on the forehead<sup>10</sup>, respectively. In the later part of the epic, Vyāsa was seen as the reincarnation of *Narayana Vishnu*.

It is ironic that *Brahmā*, so often described as “self-created” or “self-born” (svayambhu), became with the rise of a new cosmology and worldview centered on devotion to Vishnu, a son and functionary of that god. This transformation of *Brahmā* from the creator of the universe to a

“portion” of Vishnu is paralleled in case of Vyāsa: we find two references in the *MBh* identifying Vyāsa with Vishnu Narayana (Sullivan, 1994 c, p.397).

Vyāsa’s incarnation as the Narayana Vishnu is portrayed in the last part of the *Shanti Parva* (14<sup>th</sup> Episode) when the relative importance of Brahmā was diminished and replaced by Lord Vishnu. Notwithstanding myth and reality, it is possible to infer that Veda Vyāsa was a gifted man whose knowledge and intellect remained unmatched throughout the ages. The successive generations viewed him as a ‘God-man’ or, on the other hand, a ‘man-God’. It is hard to contest his contribution to the composition of the fifth Veda<sup>11</sup>, the *Mahābhārata*, and the Bhagavad Gita. He was the epitome of knowledge and wisdom. Nonetheless, the appellation that reads ‘Veda Vyāsa’ is an indicator of his association with the Vedas as well. He undoubtedly inherited the title ‘Vyāsa’ as a result of his contribution to Vedic literature.

### Veda and Vyāsa Link

The astounding dimension of the literature and the vast span of time devoted to its creation is a strong clue to presume that ‘Vedas’ or ‘Vedic literature’ is not the creation of any one or few individuals. A closer examination of Vedic literature suggests that the compiler of the ‘Vedas’ is referred to as Vyāsa. Hence, Vyāsa literally means ‘compiler’. It is thus apparent that there were compilers of the Veda who preceded Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa (Arganis, 2023, p.18). The *Mahābhārata*'s composer is the twenty-eighth Veda Vyāsa waiting in the queue to be followed by Droni (Ashwathāman) in the upcoming *Dvāpara Yuga*,

Hindu texts say Vyasa was born during a period of time known as *Dvāpara Yuga*, which is said to have ended roughly 5,000 years ago. According to the Vedas, time is cyclical, divided into four ages, or *Yugas* called *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dvapara*, and *Kali*. Because the *Yugas* move in a cycle, from *Satya* to *Kali* and then beginning again at *Satya*, a different realized

soul is born in every *Yuga* cycle, specifically for the purpose of preserving the Vedas in written form. Thus, “Veda Vyāsa” is the title or position (Allard, 2020).

According to a mythological study, Brahmā is first in line to be the Vedas' compiler. Brahmā's composition of the Vedas is equated to his act of creation. Brahmā is said to be engaged in the act of “re-creating” the Vedas when it comes to “each new creation” (Sullivan, 1994 d, p.383). Brahmā is said to be the one who guards the Vedas and spreads them among his creations. The myth goes on to state that once the yugas end, the Vedas would also vanish; then the seers are supposed to bring back the knowledge in the Vedas with the help of Brahmā- that is why Brahmā is shown as the four-faced god (Sullivan, 1994 e, p. 384). Thus, Brahmā's authority as the precursor or the first *Vyāsa* is unquestionable.

Later he was succeeded by many great saints including Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan who made all the Vedic knowledge available in written form to the succeeding generations of man, According to the *Vishnu Purāna*, there has been one Vyasa in every *Dvapara Yuga*<sup>12</sup> and in this *Manvantara*<sup>13</sup> 28 *Dvapara* yugas have gone by and as many *Vyāsas* - all *Avatars* of *Vishnu*, including the last one *Vyasa-Krishna Dvaipayana*” (*Vyasa-Vyasa Mahabharata*, n.d.). There are also indications that Vyāsa divided the *Vedas* (Sullivan, 1994f, p.385). The epic says that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan, in fact, taught the Vedas and composed the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, it may be deduced from Hindu mythology that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan was one of the *Vyāsas* who came before and would come after so long that life endures on the earth. The appellation “Vyāsa” may also be attributed to his exceptional command of Vedic literature, which enabled him to transcend the *Mahābhārata* to the rank of the fifth Veda by his excellent literary skill.

### **Veda Vyāsa in and out of the *Mahābhārata***

The name of Veda Vyāsa is most prominently associated with the *Mahābhārata* for many generations including the current age we are in. From an ordinary individual to a well-read scholar of ancient



Indian history and literature, Veda Vyāsa is first identified as the author of the *Mahābhārata*,

This ... holyman, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa, whom legend has made a kind of grandfather of the heroes of the epic, is considered by the Indians up to the present day as the author of the whole *Mahābhārata*. Only after his three sons had died- tells us the introduction to the *Mahābhārata*-has Vyāsa made publicly known to men the poem was composed by him. And this he made known to his pupil Vaiśampāyana and this Vaiśampāyana recited the whole poem in the intervals of the great serpent sacrifice<sup>14</sup> of king Janamejaya (Winternitz & V Srinivasa Sarma, 1987a, p. 78).

However, there are contradictory claims about the size and the volume of the epic. The introduction to the *Mahābhārata* tells that *Rsi* Vyāsa has narrated his work in the form of a short summary as well as in the form of an exhaustive account: “Ugrasrava<sup>15</sup> says, he knows the poem as having 8800 stanzas, where as Vyāsa explains that he composed the Samhitā of the Bharata-poem in 24000 stanzas...equally fanciful is the fact that Vyāsa also composed an epic of 60, 00,000 stanzas...” (Winternitz & V Srinivasa Sarma, 1987b, p. 79). These accounts suggest that in spite of the strong belief of the Indians that the epic was composed by Veda Vyāsa independently, the *Mahābhārata* seems to have evolved to its present form over a long period of time. Nevertheless, this does not in any way undermine the contribution of Vyāsa as an originator of this sublime piece of literature.

Veda Vyāsa is not just the composer of the great epic, he happens to be an important character in the epic, playing the role of the grandfather of the main protagonists of the epic. But interestingly, his character in the epic is limited to a few appearances. He appeared in the epic for a certain period of time,

Veda Vyāsa, whose ‘thoughts entire’, the epic portrays, being unfolded to the *sattra*-sitting brahmins of the Naimisa forest. They portray this seer as having been an important agent in the epic events, as coming and going mysteriously from epic scenes, as regularly

vanishing to who knows where after imparting a few choice words. From his deliberately concealed location he created a record of these events, which is now transmitted through his pupil Vaiśampāyana (Fitzgerald & Hiltebeitel, 2003a, p.816).

While as the composer of the *Mahābhārata*, Vyāsa gifted posterity with an invaluable piece of literature, he also fine-tuned the message and teachings of the epic by his nominal and brief presence in the epic as a character. In the epic, he first appears to meet King Janmajeya and counsels him to put off the serpent sacrifice. He was providing him justification for letting go of his fury against the Brahmins<sup>16</sup> and the snakes. To absolve the king Janmajeya of the guilt of killing a Brahmin, he reappears shortly and advises him to prepare for the recital of one lakh *Slokas* of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>17</sup>. The key message of Vyāsa during this appearance was that there was no such sin that could not be atoned for, with true effort and will. Nevertheless, Vyāsa figures prominently in the epic to fulfill the wishes of her mother Satyavati, who calls upon him to provide children for the continuation of the Bharatha dynasty. He fulfills his duty by becoming the biological father of Dhrtarāstra, Pāndu and Vidura.

After the *Pandavas* have been exiled in the woods for twelve years, Vyāsa meets Dhrtarāstra and narrates the tale of *Surabhi and Sahashrolochon*<sup>18</sup>, so that Dhrtarāstra realizes the dreadful consequences of his action. Vyāsa appears at the critical juncture of the outbreak of the Kurukshetra battle to bless Dhrtarāstra's charioteer with the *Dibyochokku* (divine power to foresee) and narrate accurately the incidents during the course of the war to Dhrtarāstra, though he himself was not in the battlefield. Not just that, Vyāsa also gifted Sanjaya with the rare power of intuition to read the minds of the combatants to understand their contemplations and strategies for the war. Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas, also obtained a divine eye, the eye of a seer, by the grace of Vyāsa.

In the *Shanti Parva*, Vyāsa makes an appearance and advises Yudhishtira to take refuge to Bhishma because knowledge is the only way to get rid of all guilt and procrastination from his mind. He

recounts to Yudhishtira various tales, including the one of Markendya Muni<sup>19</sup>, to quiet his mind and guide it towards the path of wisdom and enlightenment. Vyāsa also appeared on a few auspicious occasions to bless his posterity. However, the most important appearance of the holy Vyāsa was seen towards the end of the epic to console the weeping mothers of *Pandavas and Kauravas*. The mothers were unable to reconcile with the huge casualties of the battle. They begged the holy saint to do some miracle to get back their dead sons and other kith and kin:

Next morning, he entered the Ganga waist-deep, offered a prayer, raised both his hands and poured the Ganga water down with an invocation which brought down all the heroes from heaven... One complete night, they spent happily together in mutual chat, as a fraternity in a single family. And the next morning, there was nobody! They had all vanished (Krishnananda, 2021b, p.8).

A fundamental idea in Hindu philosophy, the line between life and death is blurred by this experience that appears to be supernatural in nature. Nobody is born and nobody is dead – there is only a transition from one state to another. Such a realization calls for a man to have the utmost degree of accomplishment and purity.

### **Vyāsa's Philosophy**

The philosophy and the teachings of Vyāsa are spread across the entire epic. The *Mahābhārata* is not just the story of a family dispute resulting in a fierce battle; it is rather the tale of a persistent struggle to resolve issues like the duty of a monarch, his obligations to the subjects, the indispensability of righteousness in public life, the social status of women, the relevance of caste hierarchy and more. The epic is an endeavor to find a kingdom guarded by the laws of religion and morality. For instance, the idea of a "just war" was first discussed in the context of contemporary international law much later, in the 17th century (Starke, 1972, p.11). But, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have a conversation that is fundamentally about the justification for going to war. Kṛṣṇa says, "there is no cause for mourning for the impending killing...And he adds the admonition to Arjuna, that he may think of his duty as warrior and

begin the justified battle” (Winternitz & V Srinivasa Sarma, 1987c, p.108).

Sri Kṛṣṇa’s persistent emphasis on the concept of just war and its impact on *dharma* ultimately forced Arjuna to understand that there are times when war is the only option to restore virtue in society. Through Sri Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsa also spreads the message of renunciation as the destiny of human life:” You have a right only to doing work; but never to its outcome or fruit; don’t think of yourself as the cause of work; but don’t abstain from work’ (Nadkarni, 2002). Vyasa's philosophy thus emphasizes the importance of detachment when it comes to *karma*. Vyasa also believed in the power of good actions and intentions. His philosophy emphasizes the importance of living a life that is not just focused on personal gain but also benefits society at large. Thus, characters like Bhishma, Vidura, and Karna are revered in the epic. Despite being vehemently opposed to war, Bhishma remained loyal to Dhṛtarāstra and backed the Kauravas because of Hastinapura<sup>20</sup>. Vidura never shied away from pointing out the obnoxious consequence of the actions of Duryodhana to Dhṛtarāstra, much to the displeasure of the king. He called Duryodhana a *Kulangar* (black sheep) and urged Dhṛtarāstra to disassociate him from the family. Karna served as a tangible illustration of loyalty and camaraderie. He kept his commitment to Kunti and Duryodhana at the expense of his life. The philosophy of Veda Vyāsa is deeply entrenched in the concept of *karma*, which is one of the fundamental principles of Hinduism. Every action that a person takes has consequences, and this, in turn, determines the future. This is known as the law of *karma*. In Veda Vyāsa's philosophy, *karma* is not just limited to actions; it also includes thoughts and intentions. This means that even if a person does not act on their thoughts or intentions, he will still be held accountable for them.

The *Shanti Parva* which is essentially Bhishma's monologue, with Yudhishtira as the main listener preaches the lessons on three aspects - *Rajadharma* (the duty of a king), principles of governance and *Apaddharma*, (the principles to be followed during crisis) and *Mokshadharma* (principles that lead to salvation):

The kingly duty (*dharma*) is held to be means of controlling the world, just as the reins are unto the steed and the goad is unto the elephant. Should the *dharma* observed by the royal sages become confused, disorder would set in, in this world and everything would be plunged in confusion. Just as the rising sun dispels unholy darkness, so does the *rajadharma* destroy all evil consequences in this world (Gupta, 1963, p.13).

Bhishma's emphasis on the king and his ability and character constitutes Veda Vyāsa's ideas about the state and politics. The State personified in the King is the foundation of *dharma* as well as the source of happiness of the subjects. Yudhishtira's explanation of *Rajadharma* was, in fact, an interpretation of the knowledge that he gathered from Bhishma at the time of his final journey.

The content of the *Shanti Parva* is presented in a discrete manner which is not often easy to contextualize at the present time, yet there were latent words of wisdom that endure across time and place,

Dr. Bhandarkar has quoted five passages from *Shanti Parva* which suggest that the kingly office arose to protect the weak against the strong...The dominant ideal that moved the king in ancient India was the attainment of *Dharma, Artha and Kama*. If *Artha* is taken in the sense of enjoyment, the *kama* in the sense of enjoyment of family and *Dharma* in the sense of maintenance of the legal system, it would be clear that in the *trivarga* (three-fold) ideal also, principles of family, property and caste dominated (Bhaskar, n.d.).

However, one would strive for salvation while practising these ideals, "Everyone must try to obtain *Moksha* (ultimate goal of life) through detachment, which can only come by remaining unaffected by worldly emotions and possessions. One must rise above sorrow and happiness as these are ephemeral. True nature of the self, *atma-gyana* (self-enlightenment) must dawn for liberation" (Sen, 2016). This aptly summarizes the philosophy of Veda Vyāsa, who intended to promulgate a social order of justice, aptitude, and self-less attachment to the nation, but not in disregard of any existing social or political evil. Vyāsa's philosophy is an evolving concept that

adapts to changing circumstances while maintaining its fundamental principle of the ultimate liberation of man.

## Conclusion

It is indeed difficult to differentiate the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa from the *Mahābhārata* and its characters. The author's ideas are latent in the text of the epic. Prima facie, the epic is a heroic work, which contextualized diverse, intricate socio-political, cultural, theological, and psychological issues of utmost importance. But, an in-depth study of the epic shows a steady affirmation on the author's part to establish the power of truth and detachment in life and lead the readers in this direction. There are discussions on the "the richly emotional and heroic and tragic modes of the text [that] are ultimately meant only to stimulate the listeners' consciousness..." (Dhand, 2004c, p.48). The *Mahābhārata's* world is thus quintessentially the creation and reflections of the ideas of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan Vyāsa who carefully constructed the context for the events in the text to leave behind an epic of enduring relevance to mankind.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* is an ancient Indian epic, originally written in Sanskrit and divided in 18 *Parvas* (Parts). The timeline of the writing of this great epic is 400 BCE-400 CE. This masterpiece of literature was made possible by *Mahamuni* (saint of saints) Vyāsa's continuous, diligent meditation. All notes provided from the epic are taken from: Pandit Kashiram Das (1986), *Kashidasi Mahābhārata* (Sonnet in Bengali), *Introduction to the Epic*, p. 25.
- <sup>2</sup> The *Purānas*, literally meaning 'old', are collections of Indian literature that deal with topics that pertain to the life and legends of gods and goddesses, sages and demi gods, astronomy, medicine, grammar, etc. These texts are written in simple Sanskrit and, unlike the Vedas, are not prohibited to the *Shudras* (non-Brahmins) and women.

- <sup>3</sup> The *Brahmā Sūtras* is a summary of the contents of *Upanishads*. It is also called *Uttara Mimamsa*, which may be described as a critical endeavor to understand and interpret the Vedas.
- <sup>4</sup> The word *Yogic* refers to or relating to yoga. Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines that originated in ancient India and aim to control the mind (*Chitta*) and mundane suffering (*Dukha*)
- <sup>5</sup> As referred in *Adi Parva*, p.107. *Bhairava* is the frightful appearance of Lord Shiva that is associated with destruction.
- <sup>6</sup> As referred to in *Adi Parva*, p.108, *Gandharva* is a class of semi-divine handsome, seductive and powerful entities.
- <sup>7</sup> When Vyāsa was engaged in producing fire for *yajna*, apsara Ghritachi appeared there. He was bewitched by the beauty of the heavenly maiden. Ghritachi then took the form of a parrot and came near the sage. Vyāsa tried to control his desire, but he was unsuccessful. The seed came out from this body and from it was born Shuka deva or Śuka.
- <sup>8</sup> The Four *Kumaras* (unmarried sons) are traditionally the four mind-born children of Lord *Brahmā* who remained five-year-olds throughout their entire life span due to the blessings of their father. There is a number of references to their scholarship in the *Puranic* literature and also in the *Upanishads*. According to the mythological account, they are *Yogis* (saints) par excellence
- <sup>9</sup> The second eye was *Muni Valmiki* (Sternbach, p.108).
- <sup>10</sup> In *Adi Parva*, *Praise of Vyāsa*, p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> The epic captures the essence of the philosophy and abstruse truths of life contained in the *Vedas* that are not easily accessible to all. It is hailed as the fifth *Veda*. The *Mahābhārata* is the confluence of all *Vedas* and *Purānas* that liberate an individual from all kinds of sins. In *Adi Parva*, *Introduction to the Epic*, p.25.
- <sup>12</sup> The Hindu scriptures mention four ages, the third of which is the *Dvāpara Yuga*. According to the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, the *Dvāpara Yuga* lasts for 864,000 years.

- <sup>13</sup> *Manvantara* is a Sanskrit word, a compound of Manu and *Antara*, literally meaning the age of a Manu. Each *Manvantara* is ruled by a Manu who, in turn, is created by Brahmà.
- <sup>14</sup> King Janamejaya, the king of Hastinapura, performed the great serpent sacrifice to avenge the death of his father by snake bite at the advice of a *Brahmàn* named Uttanka. *Adi Parva, Story of Uttanka*, p.60.
- <sup>15</sup> Ugrashrava, also known as Sauti or Suta, was the son of Lomaharshana, the principal disciple of Vyāsa. He narrated the the *Mahābhārata* to the *Saunaka* saints who were performing ‘twelve-year sacrifice’ in Naimisha Forest. *Adi Parva, Conversation between Sauti and Saunaka Saints*, p.25.
- <sup>16</sup> The curse imposed by Sringi, the son of the *Brahmàn Rsi* (Sage), caused King Parikshit, the father of Janamejaya, to pass away from a snake bite in seven days. *Adi Parva*, p.60.
- <sup>17</sup> During the *Ashwamedha Yajna* (horse sacrifice), Janmajeya killed a *Brahmàn*, attracting the disdain of everyone in society. *Adi Parva*, p.67.
- <sup>18</sup> Surabhi was a cow and Sahashrolochon was her calf. *Vana Parva, Lessons of Vyāsa to Dhrtarāstra and Vidura*, p.358.
- <sup>19</sup> By maintaining his concentration and practising strict meditation, Markendya Muni overcame his predestined death at the age of twelve and became immortal. *Shanti Parva Narration of Story of sage Markendya by Vyāsa*, pp 950-951.
- <sup>20</sup> Capital of the *Kauravas*

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