

## **Digital Transformations of the Mahabharata: Narrative Innovations and Game- based Pedagogy**

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### **Abstract**

*The unification of digital technologies into education offers many possibilities for reinterpret regional stories through involvement, participation and learner-centred attainable pedagogies. The paper focuses on the use of digital storytelling and gamification in a teacher-taught tool of understanding cultural, historical and socio- political narratives of the Mahabharata within the contemporary educational context. As this is one of the major scriptures of Sanatan Dharma, it presents complex themes of ethical, moral, spiritual, and leadership responsibilities, which give it a more existential and critical learning. Rooted upon a constructive approach, this paper highlights how storytelling can transform the complete approach of the work. The paper asserts that the digital and gamified adaptation of the Mahabharata nurture deeper understanding, cultural literacy, and reflective thoughtful approach while maintaining inclusion in the whole epic. Finally, the paper tries to answer the queries that how ancient storytelling traditions are relevant in modern educational approaches to make it more relevant in day-to-day life. In this paper, Mahabharata is depicted as a crucial teaching tool rather than only a mythological or religious work. The Mahabharata epic is full of numerous layers of meaning and the questions that arises from the tales it highlighted about right and wrong, justice and responsibility. The issues that are presented in the epic is equally important and relevant in the contemporary times both in social and private sphere. As a result, the epic is rich in material for classroom discussions, introspections, and value-based learning. The paper tries to explore how digital storytelling can make these complex concepts can be better understood by the students. Despite, reading the long epic, learners can connect with it through interactive tasks, visual narratives and story based digital platform. Students can have more understanding of the characters and their dilemmas in more personal way. Instead of just memorization, this kind of interaction can make them think critically. The other useful teaching strategy that is explored is gamification. When students start to imagine themselves in the circumstances similar to those faced by the characters in Mahabharata, through game of choices and role play, they can understand the concepts more clearly and precisely. For eg, if they were in place of Arjuna or Bhisma what choices they would have have and what decisions they would had taken in the similar situations considering the potential consequences. Instead of only reading the Dharma, students should experience its complexity and begin to realize that there is no fixed rule, but it varies depending on the situation and conditions. This study is based on the idea that active participation of students in the learning process improves their better comprehension of their material. In contrast of passive listening, the active involvement of mind through constructive approach holds the knowledge through interactions and engagements. Digital storytelling and gamification facilities this type of learning by giving students opportunities to ask questions and express their views in the present-day life situations similar to those mentioned in Mahabharata. The active involvement of students makes the classroom more inclusive as all students could share different viewpoints and perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Digital, Gamification, Mahabharata, Pedagogy, Sanatan Dharma, etc..

### **Introduction**

*The Mahabharat* is the epic tale of Hindu mythology that teaches about righteousness and Dharma. In the modern age of digitalization, educators are exploring innovative ways to explore and learn the teachings of the Mahabharata through games, animation, and creativity to have more accessible and penetrative knowledge in the modern age. It is regarded as the most extensive and profound epics in the folk literature around the globe. The Mahabharata

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epic is not only the story of family rivalry but a large philosophical narrative that contains the moral, social, political, and even spiritual values of great Indian culture. The basic storyline of Mahabharata has lasting examination of human responsibilities, ethical decisions, justice, leadership, loyalty, and fruits of the decisions taken. The conflict between the brothers- i.e., the Pandvas and the Kauravas shows the inner discords that every person faces in his or her life, thus this great epic remains truly relevant since time immemorial. The story of Mahabharata makes it listeners qualify to understand its learnings in every sphere of life, be it the personal, society.

At the inner core of Mahabharata, there is Bhagavad Gita, a detailed documented dialogues between Lord Krishna and normal human being that contains the questions of right and wrong, the importance of knowing your actions and taking the right actions in every situation of life. Even today in the contemporary world, the war field setting and the moral dilemmas a person feels within himself or herself, make the teachings equally important and meaningful. The concepts of Dharma and ones Karma discussed in detail in this conversation stills holds the impact in the society and its well functionality.

The interactive storytelling through games, animation can serve the purpose of theoretical model of practical learnings. When the students/children are asked to participate in the situation like shown on episode, putting them in the place of the characters and motivating them in taking the decisions, not only develop their reflective understanding but also their personal understanding of the Dharama at very young age. Despite treating the epic as another mythological story, digital platforms provide the opportunities to students to examine and explore the themes in their day-to-day life in relation to their social responsibility and personal identity.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how the contemporary digital education and the ancient Indian mythological and ethical philosophy meet. By analyzing the teaching of Mahabharata and how it can be conveyed and communicated in a better way through creative and technological medium, the study aims to determine whether the digital engagements can improve the understandings of Dharama and moral reasoning. In doing this, it tries to contribute in the more general conversations about the value-based education and the cultural learning through the accessible digital tools.

### **Pre-Digital Era**

In the pre-digital era, the stories were told and retold orally or through sacred books and stage performances, and they not only provided the information but also insightful values necessary for a smooth and prosperous society.

The introduction of television in India in the 1980s proved to be a cornerstone as it marked a significant shift to more people in the nooks and corners of the country through the telecast of BR Chopra's serial "Mahabharat" (1988). It provided the unity factor that strengthened the mythological significance in modernising India.

Storytelling played the essential role in forming social and cultural life long before the arrival of electronic media in the country. Elders, priests, and skilled story tellers frequently told stories in their homes, worship places, community places and they not only recounted the events but also explained the moral teachings it contains. The Mahabharata with its complex storyline and wide range of characters offers ample material for such oral transmission. The stories demonstrate the output of decisions, choices, difficulties faced in the leadership, significance of the ethically bound behavior making it useful tool for learning in the successive generations.

Regional plays, folk theatre and stage performances make these stories spread further with some added insights. Any subplot of the epic was performed in traditional dance forms like Kathakali with music, dance, and dialogues. These shows do not mere entertained but also encouraged the crowd to look into the moral and social challenges felt by the character/s. People were able to participate in these performances and this kind of involvement helped them to acquire significant lessons about moral duty, justice and personal responsibility by observing and listening.

Sacred texts also played the significant part in preserving the stories alive through many centuries. Manuscripts and printed copies allowed teachers and scholars to read the epic in detail and also helped them present their own versions and viewpoints by altering some minor facts for the sake of well understanding and learning. Together people were able to comprehend moral concepts and values.

Television also played a significant part in keeping people connected. The telecast of the show Mahabharat on TV, gave everyone the story they could share and relate to in the changing dynamics of Indian society during the economic liberation phase of the country. People from different cultures, regions, knowing different languages and background were able to watch the same episodes simultaneously and talked about it developing the sense of community building. Even though it was on screen but it had given the rise of people bonding and topic of discussion further strengthen the concept that of technology have the potential to keep the traditional story alive.

The transition of oral storytelling to stage performances and to telecasting on TV, showed the power of adaptability of these narratives. Whether told by word of mouth, performed on stage

or shown on TV, thought the medium of communication has changed but one thing remained constant that the moral values and teaching the epic teaches.

This journey of Mahabharata from the elders telling the story to stage plays and to telecasting on TV shows the epic has survived the test of time and it continues to inspire and flourishes the successive generations. Each way of storytelling gave it new form and version but the core ideas of its teaching is not substituted. Television doesn't replace the traditionally style of storytelling but it gave new dynamics and reach of audience.

### **Digitalisation and New Aspects**

In India, the 21st century marked a period of unprecedented digital growth. According to the data of TRAI, the country has more than 800mn internet users in the year 2023 and is greatly influenced by the huge penetration of mobile users. Technology has transformed the way educators engage with students and deliver content. The concept of Digital storytelling is about the use of multimedia and newer technology like Virtual Reality through animation, character -based perspectives, use of background music to ignite the emotional depth of a particular event.

The rapid growth of technology has provided teachers with multiple new ways of sharing the stories and information which were once only present in books and can be given through traditional lectures. Students can now engage in the storytelling activities by actively participating in the classroom rather than merely listening and rote learning the story. The usage of animations, pictures, sound effects help students grasp information easily and for long time thus making learning more fun and interesting.

The biggest ability of digital storytelling is that it brings any story into life. For instance, in Mahabharata is full of lessons about morality, righteousness, leadership, duty and dharma. In the past, these stories of Mahabharata were told in oral form or performed on stages and it was felt that though people were keen to listen it or watch the play but the major missing part of it was that people were not fully involved with the story. These methods were useful but they relied more on imagination rather than involvement majorly the audience involved, which make the lesson feel far away from understanding. With digital storytelling students can engage with the story more effectively and could relate to the characters. They may hear the emotions in the voices of characters of Mahabharata, can see how animated characters dealt with the challenges and could developed the decisions making skills themselves by listen and watching the characters which also involves them by asking what would they have done if they are in their places.

Students can also study stories at their own pace through digital storytelling. Unlike the traditional methods, it allows students to pause, review and reflect on the events. Interactive features like quizzes, role-play or branching storylines provides students to experiment with decisions and think critically about them. This discourages rote learning and promotes deeper understanding. Lessons learned from Mahabharata can be applied in the real life by students.

The concept of inclusion is also very crucial. Students who might doesn't have access to traditional learning tools can be reached easily by digital storytelling. With mobile phones, internet access and multimedia tools, students from different geographical locations, cultural backgrounds can easily get access to the same material like others. This helps in creating fairer learning environment where stories from Mahabharata, moral lessons can be available to everyone not just to those in cities or privileged areas.

Digital storytelling is being further advanced by Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR). In VR, students or any other for that matter can visit the story universe and see the things as if they were really there in the present. AR adds digital elements in the real world combining digital and physical encounters. These resources makes the story like Mahabharata feels more authentic and easier to understand. Students can 'visit' the battleground, in the Kings' court and took part in the various daily chores of the people there with almost real.

Digital storytelling serves as a link between traditional and contemporary learning methods in Indian educational institutes. As seen by the epic like Mahabharata, where complex moral dilemmas, social values were conveyed in the narrative form but in todays day and age, digital tools carry these values and learnings forward through audio-video materials. Digital storytelling meets the need and interests of learners through digital connections and preserving cultural depth.

The use of technology has given a whole new perspective in the learning and understanding of complex issues in a much easier language and a lucid way. The digital storytelling provides a big boost to the understanding and feeling of the plot, character in the retrospective times to the contemporary time.

### **Gamification and Its Role**

Gamification means adding game design elements like a point system and challenges to make the learning experience more enjoyable and productive. Gamification can transform traditional storytelling into more interactive and interesting for modern audiences. In the Mahabharata, practical gamification could be:

1. Avatar Creation: It allows the users to experience the prominent Mahabharat characters (such as Krishna, Draupadi).
2. Virtual Reality Exploration: VR could enable the users to “walk through” the digitally established the then town of Hastinapur and Kurukshetra and could relive pivotal moments.
3. Reward Systems: The gamification could enable users to claim points and rewards on completion of challenges, quizzes, and solving puzzles related to the story of the epic.
4. Dynamic Storytelling: The gamification could also enable users to explore the dynamic way of retelling the main events, like a game of dice, the Bhagavad Gita dialogue and the battle.
5. Decision-Making Scenarios: Players can be put morally difficult circumstances, like Arjun’s hesitancy in the battle ground. These decisions can enable them to think critically.
6. Level-Based Progression: Starting from the Kauravs and Pandavas early lives and moving forward to Kurukshetra war, the epic can be broken into different levels and parts, and students can learn from each part.
7. Interactive Quests and Missions: Students can finish assignments, such as setting up military plans or assisting in building of Indraprasth plot.
8. Collaborative Team Play: Digital storytelling will ensure the development of collaborative learning as learners can form groups among themselves and represent the various characters from minor to major. This not only helps in better understanding but in developing good communication skills and planning.
9. Knowledge Badges and Achievements: Special badges or remarks could be given to students for mastering any themes which will enable them to learn one or two skills from the epic, be it of Diplomacy or importance of sacrifices.
10. Time-Bound Challenges: Some tasks which are based on important outcomes of the epic and involve the analytical skills of the learner like strategy formation, court discussions which are bounded by time could increase the keenness in the event.
11. Narrative Reflection Points: Some points could also be written by the students as notes on particular narrative which could enable them to pause and think and will help them to form connection of emotional involvement and academic understanding.
12. Augmented Reality Elements: AR features can help learners to think and imagine about divine weapons used in the war, the battlefield strategy formation on the ground, this mixing of technology and visualization of students could lead to a better understanding.

With the help of the above-mentioned components, the Mahabharata epic can be transformed from the voluminous text to experience it at the deep level. It will help in making the new minds to embrace with the cultural facts and develop critical thinking.

#### Pedagogy Narrative

1. Ethical Learning: The complex story of *The Mahabharat* can be broken into simpler language and can teach the ethics that one should be aware of to live a meaningful life.

2. Karma and Consequences: Through the Mahabharata, we can learn that every action has its consequences. The epic illustrates that a good or bad decision holds its own equal accountability and importance.

3. Practical Wisdom in Life: *The Mahabharat* teaches us the duty, sacrifice, resilience and provides valuable guidance for countering professional challenges.

4. Focus on Solutions: The Epic stress upon the importance of seeking solutions rather than creating prolonged delays in ending conflicts.

5. Collaborative Learning: The great epic teaches us about the value of learning through collaboration as each character in Mahabharat has their own mastery in one skill and through joining with unity among themselves major task could be completed with ease.

6. Emotional Intelligence and Self-Control: The Mahabharata epic is full of different human emotions- joy, ambitiousness, royalty, hate and forgiveness. Students could observe how different characters responds to different situations like emotional, compassion and could learn the importance of patience and sacrifices. For instance, the outcome of anger is generally conflict while being calm leads to wiser decisions. Development of emotional quotient can be expected among students.

7. Leadership and Governance: The epic presents different levels of leadership, both smooth and flawed. Students can analyze the qualities and decisions of rulers which they can acquire for the integrity, fairness, and accountability in their respective life. The epic provides a thoughtful narrative to discuss skills required not in academic but also in professional environments.

8. Conflict Resolution and Dialogue: Before the battle in Kurukshetra, various attempts were made to solve the bone of contentions through dialogues and negotiations. It demonstrates that communication and compromise should be the first step in solving any disputes. In pedagogy, these teachings can encourage the learners to resolve differences, that standing with peace should be the first move by leaders.

9. Respect for Diversity of Perspectives: The beauty of Mahabharata epic is that it does not consider any character as completely right or wrong, in fact it shows multiple viewpoints which are shaped by varying factors like the then circumstances and personal biases. This complex situation allows young learners to not follow any opinion but to encourage students to analyse every situations.

10. Spiritual and Philosophical Inquiry: The dialogue of the Bhagavad Gita inside the epic put forward questions about responsibilities, objectives, and the essence of life. These questions give space for intellectual and divine understanding. In academic setting, these discussions encourage students' understanding of basic human values dealing with contemporary concerns.

### **Challenges**

The digital development of mythical stories has many difficulties, despite its potential. It is very hard to maintain the authenticity while using the entertainment elements. Also, there is collaboration between educators, technologists and scholars. Furthermore, it has to be added that due to an increase in the digital reach, foreign countries are also consuming the Indian mythological stories, which raises concerns about cultural appropriation. Looking ahead, there are various opportunities for creative and inclusive epic storytelling in the digital sphere that are highly promising. The rapid advancement in AI is not only enabling the creation of micro-drama animations but also enables to reach of new audiences on digital platforms.

This will make Mahabharat studies more engaging, inclusive and relevant to the new generation who do not show keen interest and the technological advancement will help in preserving the great epic stories alive with great learning and morals.

Nevertheless, the translating of old myths into digital forms is not easy task. Stories like Mahabharata are not just simple tales but a complex mixture of multiple stories and sub stories in it. While adding dramatic scenes, music can add appeal to the content but it may take away the essence of originality from it.

The growing global also bring new responsibilities and obligations. It is good that Indian mythologies is present worldwide thanks to the internet but occasionally it may bring the misconceptions and misleading interpretations. Thus, while recreating these stories digitally care and respect should be utmost. Human guidance is needed for fact check and epics authenticity should be preserved

Despite of these challenges, digital myth storytelling appears to have a promising future. When used thoughtfully technology can assist young learners to relate and connect to these

stories which might otherwise felt distant and difficult to relate to. Learning may be made more enjoyable and meaningful. Also, Mahabharata timeless lessons can be preserved and be past to new generation with all new digital dynamics.

### Conclusion

In modern India, the digital age has not only revolutionised the way mythological stories of two great epics are created but also how they are adapted and consumed through the use of modern technology. The fusion of digital storytelling and gamification with the Mahabharata narrative offers a new dimension to education. As the stories from the Mahabharata move from manuscripts written on stone and peepal leaves to androids and streaming platforms, it has become more dynamic due to the use of technology. However, this transformation came with challenges. The politicisation and commercialisation of these sacred epics have raised questions about their authenticity. Despite these concerns, digitalisation has offered vast opportunities to amplify the marginalised voice and mythological ecosystems.

This transformation fosters deeper narrative understandings, offers multiple perspectives and promotes critical thinking, making the complex epic stories more accessible and understandable.

Additionally, educators and artists can now deliver the Mahabharata epic in such a way that it appeals to the younger generation otherwise it may not ignite the interest of the young minds. In addition to the knowledge the learners can now experience it firsthand through animations, games, avatars which could engage them in the story enhancing the critical thinking. By actively participating in the learning process, students are encouraged to comprehend the topic and learn the experiences and morals. Digital storytelling serves as the tool of not only entertainment but also for learning.

Also, the digital space promotes the collaboration among academicians, instructors and technologists. By working together, all these experts can ensure the authenticity while being pedagogically effective. This teamwork also improves the novel formats like interactive tests, Virtual Reality experiences, interesting quizzes which enhances the learning more memorable and meaningful.

Going forward, there is lot of promise in fusion of mythology with technology. As tools like Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality continues to improve, more occasions will come where there will be development of new interesting and personalized learning experiences. Students can engage with new set of information and perspective of epics and myths which were not possible before. The digital Mahabharata can remain culturally significant and can

develop into inspiring learning resource. Digital technology can help preserve the epics and can ensure its wisdom, morals and teachings continues to remain relevant not only for today but also for time to come.

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