

Indian Classical Literature PYQ 2021

Q1. Discuss the notion of heroism as reflected in the representation of Arjuna and Karna in the prescribed sections of The Mahabharata.

Ans. In the epic Hindu text, The Mahabharata, the notion of heroism is reflected through the contrasting representations of Arjuna and Karna. Both characters are celebrated as warriors and possess admirable qualities, yet they embody different aspects of heroism that emerge through their actions, values, and motivations.

Arjuna, one of the Pandava princes, is portrayed as the embodiment of dharma (righteousness) and a paradigmatic hero. He is skilled in warfare, a master archer, and a noble warrior who adheres to moral principles. Arjuna's heroism is deeply rooted in his unwavering commitment to his duty and the preservation of righteousness. He symbolizes the ideal warrior who fights for a just cause and demonstrates self-discipline, humility, and loyalty.

Arjuna's heroism is particularly evident in the section known as the Bhagavad Gita, where he experiences moral dilemma and despair on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. When faced with the prospect of fighting against his own relatives, teachers, and loved ones, Arjuna questions the righteousness of war and momentarily loses his will to fight. However, Lord Krishna, his charioteer and divine guide, imparts spiritual wisdom and philosophical teachings to restore Arjuna's faith and sense of duty. Arjuna ultimately rises above his doubt, embraces his role as a warrior, and fulfills his obligations, exemplifying heroic resolve and moral integrity.

On the other hand, Karna, a prominent character in The Mahabharata, represents a different facet of heroism. As the son of Kunti and the sun god Surya, Karna possesses extraordinary skills and noble qualities. He is known for his unwavering loyalty, unwavering dedication to his friends, and unmatched bravery on the battlefield. However, Karna's heroism is tainted by his complex background and the circumstances of his birth, leading to his marginalization and struggle for acceptance.

Karna's heroism lies in his resilience, endurance, and unwavering determination to overcome adversity. Despite facing discrimination and societal biases, Karna rises above his humble origins and seeks recognition and respect. His actions are driven by a strong sense of personal honor and loyalty, even at the cost of aligning with the Kauravas, the antagonistic faction in the epic. Karna's character highlights the complexity of heroism, as he demonstrates noble virtues while being entangled in conflicting loyalties.

The contrasting representations of Arjuna and Karna in The Mahabharata reflect different dimensions of heroism. Arjuna exemplifies heroism through adherence to dharma, moral rectitude, and a steadfast commitment to righteousness. His heroism is characterized by selflessness, humility, and unwavering dedication to his duties. On the other hand, Karna embodies heroism in his resilience, loyalty, and determination to prove himself despite societal prejudices. His heroism is marked by personal honor, courage, and the pursuit of self-identity.

In conclusion, The Mahabharata presents diverse perspectives on heroism through the characters of Arjuna and Karna. Arjuna's heroism is rooted in his adherence to dharma and moral principles, while Karna's heroism emerges from his resilience and pursuit of personal honor. The contrasting

portrayals of these characters highlight the complexity of heroism and the different paths individuals may take in embodying noble virtues and facing the challenges that arise in their lives.

Q2. Examine the features of a Prakarna in The Mrichchhakatika.

Ans. In the Sanskrit play "Mrichchhakatika" (The Little Clay Cart), written by Shudraka, a prominent feature is the use of a Prakarana, a type of drama that focuses on domestic or social themes. The Prakarana form, which emerged as a distinct genre of Sanskrit drama, typically explores the lives of ordinary people and their interactions within society. Here are some features of a Prakarana as seen in "Mrichchhakatika":

Realistic Setting: A Prakarana is known for its depiction of realistic settings and everyday life. "Mrichchhakatika" is set in the ancient city of Ujjayini (present-day Ujjain), providing a backdrop that reflects the social and cultural milieu of the time. The play showcases the lives of various characters from different social backgrounds, offering a glimpse into their struggles, aspirations, and relationships.

Characterization: Prakarana dramas typically feature a wide range of characters from different social classes and walks of life. In "Mrichchhakatika," the play presents characters such as Charudatta, a noble but impoverished merchant, Vasantasena, a courtesan, and other supporting figures from different sections of society. The diverse cast allows for exploration of various perspectives, conflicts, and social dynamics.

Social Commentary: Prakaranas often provide social commentary, shedding light on prevalent social issues or critiquing societal norms. "Mrichchhakatika" addresses themes such as class distinctions, corruption, and the limited agency of women. The play examines the challenges faced by individuals due to their social status and explores the consequences of societal expectations and constraints.

Humor and Wit: Prakaranas frequently incorporate humor and wit to engage the audience and lighten the tone of the drama. "Mrichchhakatika" features comedic interludes, wordplay, and witty dialogues between characters. These comedic elements provide moments of levity amidst the conflicts and dilemmas faced by the characters.

Blend of Tragedy and Comedy: Prakaranas often combine tragic and comic elements to create a dynamic and engaging narrative. "Mrichchhakatika" exemplifies this blend, as it incorporates elements of both tragedy and comedy. The play depicts the struggles and tragedies faced by the characters, including violence, betrayal, and loss. Simultaneously, it incorporates comedic scenes and characters that offer a respite from the serious themes.

Emphasis on Plot: Prakaranas tend to place a significant emphasis on the development of the plot, with intricate twists and turns to captivate the audience. "Mrichchhakatika" follows a complex plot involving love, mistaken identities, and dramatic events that drive the narrative forward. The interplay of various plotlines keeps the audience engaged and invested in the story.

In conclusion, "Mrichchhakatika" exemplifies several features of a Prakarana drama. It presents a realistic setting, diverse characters from different social classes, and explores social issues while incorporating humor and wit. The play combines tragedy and comedy, and its intricate plot adds intrigue and captivates the audience. Through these features, "Mrichchhakatika" reflects the essence of a Prakarana, offering a vivid portrayal of life and society during its time.

Q3. Examine the significance of curse and the ring in the plot of abhijnanasakuntalam.

Ans. In the Sanskrit play "Abhijnanasakuntalam" (The Recognition of Sakuntala), written by Kalidasa, the curse and the ring play significant roles in the development of the plot. They serve as catalysts for the events that unfold and contribute to the overall narrative structure and themes of the play.

The Curse:

The curse in "Abhijnanasakuntalam" is a pivotal element that sets the plot in motion. King Dushyanta encounters the sage Durvasa, who becomes enraged due to a perceived slight and places a curse on the king. The curse states that Dushyanta will forget about his encounter with Sakuntala until a token reminding him of her is presented to him.

This curse serves as the central conflict of the play. It leads to the separation of Dushyanta and Sakuntala and drives the subsequent actions and dilemmas faced by the characters. The curse creates a sense of longing, anticipation, and suspense as the audience awaits the resolution of the curse and the ultimate recognition of Sakuntala by Dushyanta.

The curse also serves to explore themes of fate, destiny, and the power of divine intervention in human lives. It suggests that even powerful figures like Dushyanta are subject to the consequences of their actions and the whims of fate. The curse highlights the fragility of human relationships and the potential for misunderstandings and missed opportunities.

The Ring:

The ring in "Abhijnanasakuntalam" plays a vital role in the recognition and resolution of the play's conflict. When Sakuntala arrives at the court of Dushyanta to remind him of their past love, she realizes that she has lost the ring he gave her as a token of their love and union. Without the ring, she is unable to prove her identity and establish her connection to Dushyanta.

The ring acts as a symbol of love, commitment, and the union between Dushyanta and Sakuntala. Its loss creates a barrier between the two characters and obstructs their reunion. The search for the ring becomes a significant plot device, adding suspense and anticipation to the narrative.

Ultimately, it is through the retrieval of the lost ring that the curse is broken, and Sakuntala is recognized by Dushyanta as his wife and the mother of his child. The ring serves as the key to the recognition and reunion of the lovers, highlighting its significance in the resolution of the play.

Moreover, the ring also represents the concept of karma and the idea that actions have consequences. Its loss and subsequent recovery serve as a metaphorical journey of self-discovery and the realization of past mistakes.

In conclusion, the curse and the ring in "Abhijnanasakuntalam" carry great significance in shaping the plot and themes of the play. The curse drives the central conflict, exploring themes of fate and destiny, while the ring symbolizes love, commitment, and the resolution of the curse. Together, these elements contribute to the dramatic tension, emotional resonance, and eventual recognition and reunion of the central characters.

Q4. Comment on the process and significance of deification of Kannaki as a goddess in Book III of The Cilappatikaram.

Ans. In Book III of "The Cilappatikaram," an epic Tamil poem written by Ilango Adigal, the process and significance of the deification of Kannaki as a goddess is a central theme that highlights the power of divine transformation and the elevation of mortal beings to a higher spiritual status.

The deification of Kannaki occurs after the tragic events that unfold in the poem, including the unjust execution of her husband Kovalan and her subsequent revenge. After Kannaki's revenge, she ascends to the heavens in a divine chariot, shedding her mortal form and being transformed into a goddess.

The process of deification symbolizes Kannaki's spiritual transcendence and her transformation into a divine entity. It represents her attainment of a higher spiritual realm, where she becomes an object of worship and reverence. This elevation to the status of a goddess reflects the belief in the power of divine justice and the reward for righteous actions.

The significance of Kannaki's deification lies in the moral and ethical lessons conveyed by her story. Kannaki embodies the ideals of justice, righteousness, and the unwavering pursuit of truth. Her deification reinforces the notion that those who uphold these values will be rewarded, even in the face of immense suffering and adversity.

The deification of Kannaki also carries political and cultural significance within the context of Tamil society. She becomes a symbol of Tamil identity and pride, representing the strength and resilience of the Tamil people. The worship of Kannaki as a goddess, even to this day, signifies the enduring legacy of her story and the reverence held for her as a figure of inspiration and devotion.

Furthermore, Kannaki's deification serves to emphasize the power and agency of women. In a patriarchal society, her transformation into a goddess highlights the strength and independence of women, their ability to challenge societal norms, and their capacity to effect change.

The deification of Kannaki in Book III of "The Cilappatikaram" reflects the belief in divine justice, the moral and ethical lessons of the narrative, the political and cultural significance for the Tamil people, and the empowerment of women. Kannaki's elevation to the status of a goddess immortalizes her story and serves as a source of inspiration for generations, reinforcing the idea that righteousness and the pursuit of justice can lead to spiritual transcendence and divine recognition.

Q5. Examine the implications of Draupadi's "terrible question" in the dicing episode.

Ans. Draupadi's "terrible question" in the dicing episode of the Mahabharata holds significant implications, highlighting the complex dynamics of power, gender, and morality in the epic. This question arises after Yudhishtira, driven by his addiction to gambling, stakes and loses Draupadi in a dice game, leading to her humiliation and attempted disrobing in the assembly. Draupadi poses the question, "Who is entitled to stake me in the game, my husband or the winner?"

Assertion of Agency: Draupadi's question is a powerful assertion of her agency and challenges the patriarchal norms and assumptions surrounding her ownership. By posing this question, Draupadi challenges the notion that a woman can be treated as a mere object to be won or lost in a game. Her

question challenges the power dynamics and calls attention to the injustice and indignity she has suffered.

Questioning Morality: Draupadi's question also raises moral dilemmas regarding the actions of the characters involved. By asking who has the right to stake her in the game, she challenges the moral compass of Yudhishtira, who risked her in the first place, and the assembly, who remained silent during her humiliation. It forces the characters and the readers to confront the ethical implications of their actions and the consequences of their choices.

Examination of Honor and Duty: Draupadi's question delves into the notions of honor and duty. As the wife of the Pandavas, she questions whether it is honorable for her to be staked in a game and treated as a prize. She raises the issue of the duty of her husbands to protect her and maintain her dignity, pointing out the failure of those duties in that moment. Draupadi's question thus highlights the complex interplay between personal honor, familial duty, and societal expectations.

Highlighting Injustice and Social Commentary: Draupadi's question serves as a critique of the injustice and inequality prevalent in the society depicted in the Mahabharata. It brings attention to the mistreatment of women, the disregard for their agency, and the absence of a just system to protect their rights. The question serves as a social commentary, exposing the flaws and oppressive norms within the society of the epic.

Overall, Draupadi's "terrible question" in the dicing episode of the Mahabharata carries significant implications. It challenges patriarchal norms, questions morality, examines honor and duty, and highlights the injustices and inequalities faced by women. Draupadi's question serves as a powerful moment of resistance and defiance, shedding light on the complex dynamics of power, gender, and morality in the epic narrative.

Q6. Comment on the theme of Justice in any of the plays/epics studied by you.

Ans. One of the plays/epics that explores the theme of justice is "Antigone" by Sophocles. In this Greek tragedy, the concept of justice is central to the conflict and moral dilemmas faced by the characters.

The theme of justice in "Antigone" revolves around the clash between divine law and human law. The protagonist, Antigone, believes in the supremacy of divine law and feels compelled to bury her brother Polynices, despite a decree from King Creon forbidding it. Antigone's actions are motivated by her conviction that it is her moral duty to honor her family and the gods, even if it means defying the edicts of the state.

Creon, on the other hand, represents the embodiment of human law and order. He believes in the primacy of civil law and enforces his decree to maintain stability and uphold the authority of the state. Creon argues that the laws he sets forth are essential for maintaining societal order and preventing anarchy.

The clash between Antigone and Creon brings to the forefront questions about the nature of justice and the conflict between individual conscience and societal norms. Antigone's unwavering adherence to divine law and her defiance of the state raises profound ethical dilemmas. Is justice purely a matter of following the laws of the state, or does it involve a higher moral duty to uphold principles of compassion, familial duty, and religious beliefs?

The play also explores the consequences of pursuing justice in an uncompromising manner. Both Antigone and Creon suffer tragic consequences for their beliefs and actions. Antigone meets a tragic end, while Creon experiences a profound personal loss and undergoes a transformation in his understanding of justice.

Through the character of Antigone and the conflicts she faces, Sophocles raises questions about the limitations of human law and the importance of moral principles in achieving true justice. The play prompts the audience to reflect on the tension between the laws of the state and individual conscience, and the complexities of justice in the face of competing obligations.

In conclusion, the theme of justice in "Antigone" explores the conflict between divine law and human law, and the moral dilemmas faced by the characters in their pursuit of justice. The play raises questions about the nature of justice, the clash between individual conscience and societal norms, and the consequences of unwavering adherence to principles. Sophocles invites the audience to reflect on the complexities of justice and the ethical dimensions of human actions and decisions.

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