INTERPOLATIONS IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA*

By

M. A. MEHENDALE

It is now generally accepted that the Mahābhārata (Mbh.), originally composed by Vyāsa and then recited, at his instance,1 by Vaiśampāyana for the benefit of Janamejaya at the latter's snake sacrifice (1.1.8-9; 1.54.1, 17-21), has come down to us not in its original form but with many additions made in it, in the course of its long transmission, first by reciters and later by writers of manuscripts (mss.)2 at different places and different times. There was a time when scholars were somewhat reductant to admit interpolations in the Mbh. But now there would hardly be any one who would doubt the presence of much that is spurious in the Mbh. For, if he compares the mss. of different available versions he will come across passages which are found only in a single ms. or a group of mss. but are totally missing in the others.3 This situation

* Being the Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (Seventy-sixth) Death Anniversary Address, delivered at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Pune) on the Ṛṣipāñcami Day, 23rd August, 2001.

1 And, presumably, also in his presence.

2 It cannot be said when exactly the ms. tradition of the Mbh. began. There is absolutely no basis for the Brahmi-Ganēśa episode in which the latter is represented as the writer of the text of the Mbh. dictated to him by Vyāsa. The passage is found mainly in the Devanāgarī version as an addition to an already added passage which occurs, besides the Devanāgarī version, also in some ms. of the Southern recension. It does not occur at all in Śāradā, Nepali, Maithili and Bengali versions of the northern recension (cf. Appendix 1.1, pp. 884-885). But even after the ms. tradition began, there is ample evidence to show that the mss. of different places were compared and additions made in the margins or as additional folios. "...a study of critical apparatus shows that there has intervened a long period in the history of the Mahābhārata in which there was a free comparison of manuscripts and extensive mutual borrowings." (V. S. Sukthankar, "Prolegomena" to Adiparvan, p. LXXIX. The tendency is witnessed even as late as 1931-1933 when the editor of the Mahābhārata, Southern Recension, has quietly inserted stanzas not found in any of the southern mss. utilized by him for his edition but were known to him from some northern version (cf. V. S. S. Prolegomena, pp. LXXXV).

3 "There has been an extraordinary reluctance among scholars to face the fact that the Mahābhārata manuscripts may contain and do contain quantities of spurious matter. But there is no excuse for such reluctance. The critical apparatus of this edition contains a unique record of hundreds of lines which are evidently and unquestionably spurious." V. S. Sukthankar, Prolegomena to Adiparvan, p. L.
can be explained either by assuming additions of lines and passages in some mss. or omissions of them in others. But since the tendency of those responsible for the transmission of the text has all along been, if necessary, to add passages to the text received by them, but never to omit anything from it, the theory of omission is ruled out. One can adduce various kinds of good reasons in support of the theory of additions, but not one to account for omissions. In such a situation the burden of giving good grounds for admitting omissions must rest on those who favour the theory of omissions.  

The number of passages added to the Mahābhārata text is very large. This kind of large scale fluctuation of the text is not witnessed in any other Sanskrit text, except perhaps the Rāmāyaṇa. This, in fact, is as it should be, not only because of the immense popularity of the epic poem, but also because, in my opinion, there is a specific sanction in the Mahābhārata for the activity of the reciters to make additions to their text. The stanza concerned has been misunderstood. It reads as: itihāsapurāṇābhāyāṁ vedāṁ samupabrīṁhayet / bibhety alpaśrutād vedo māṁ ayaṁ pratarisyati∥ (1.1.204). The stanza is generally taken to mean that one should interpret the Veda with the help of the Itihāsa and the Purāṇa. It is true that some parts of a text like the Rgveda, especially the so-called sanātana hymns of the Rgveda, are better understood with the help of the narratives found in such post-Rgvedic texts as the Brāhmaṇas, the Nirukta, the Brhaddevata and also in the post-Vedic texts like the Mahābhārata. But that has nothing to do with the stanza just cited. In the first instance the root brīṁ- or samupabrīṁ- does not mean 'to interpret'. It means 'to enlarge, to make strong'. And, secondly, the word Veda of this stanza does not refer to a text like the Rgveda. What it really refers to is made clear by the very next stanza which begins as: kārṣṇam vedam imam vidvāṁ śrāvayitvārtham aśnute 'by reciting this Veda composed by Kṛṣṇa (Dvaipāyana) one achieves one's purpose.' Hence the word Veda of the preceding stanza does not refer to a text like the Rgveda, but to the Veda of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, i.e. the Mahābhārata.  

---

4 "I should now go so far as to assert that probably not one of the some fifty MSS. I have studied for Book 2, nor any of their genealogical ancestors, ever deliberately or intentionally omitted a single line of the text." (F. Edgerton, Introduction to Sahāpārvan, p. XXXIV. Also cf. the following remark of V. S. Sukthankar. "And it is fair to demand of a person who alleges the authenticity of such one-recension passages why the rival recension does not contain it." (Prolegomena to Ādi, p. XCVI.)

5 v. 1. pratarisyati.

6 That the Mahābhārata was looked upon as a Veda is shown by another passage: vedāṁ adhyātpayāṁ āsa mahābhāratapahācamān 1.57.74.
discussion therefore means that one should expand the Veda, i.e. the Mahābhārata, by adding to it the narratives from the Itihāsa and the Purāṇa (and one who is well-versed (vidvān) can easily do that). The Veda is afraid that a person with little knowledge would easily cross over it, i.e. he would complete the reading of the text soon if, owing to his little knowledge, he was not able to expand his text by means of additions.  

In such a situation it would have been a matter of great surprise if a popular text like the Mahābhārata which was orally transmitted for many centuries was not burdened with many additions.  The critical edition of the text now lays bare all spurious matter which could be easily set aside on the objective evidence of the manuscripts. The guiding principle that was adopted for this initial task of sifting was not to admit any passage, short or long, in the constituted text if that was not uniformly documented in all the versions of the Northern and the Southern recension.  As a corollary, the editors were bound to admit into the constituted text a passage which was uniformly documented in all the versions even when that meant admitting into the text stanzas which contradicted each other.  The editors in such cases have noted such contradictions and told the readers that they are the results of conflation of divergent versions of the same event. The reciters in their anxiety to have into their text anything known to them did not much care for the contradictions involved in the process. The editors therefore have warned the readers that, although they have succeeded in removing much spurious matter, their text remains still burdened with much which could equally he spurious. They are in no sense presenting to the readers the ‘original’ Mahābhārata attributed to Vyāsa and recited by Vaiśampāyana, not even the version that was narrated by Śūta Urgrāsrava in the Naimiṣa forest to the sages assembled there for the long sacrificial session of Śaunaka. 

---

7 Cf. in this connection the following remark of V. S. Sukthankar: “No one in the past found the epic text too long. Far from it. It was perhaps not long enough.” Prolegomena to Ādi, p. L11.

8 Cf. the proud statement contained in the Mahābhārata 1.16.1-19: 1.4.1-11; 1.53.27-36. For V. S. Sukthankar’s remarks see Prolegomena to Ādi, p. CII.

9 The only exception made by the General Editor was to print in the text the auspicious mantra: nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya etc. at the beginning of only the Ādi Parvan. This stanza is totally missing in the entire Southern recension and therefore is considered spurious.

10 For the principles adopted for preparing the constituted text, see V. S. Sukthankar, Prolegomena to Ādi, pp. LXXXVI ff.
The task of removing the spurious matter that still remains in the critically constituted text and bringing it as close as possible to the oldest version of the Mbh. has been left by them to future students of the text. For, arriving at the truly ‘original’ text of Vyāsa is well nigh impossible.

What I propose to do this evening is to give some examples of different kinds of interpolations in the Mbh. :

1. Those revealed by ms. evidence and set aside by the editors, they are found in the footnotes or appendices to the critical editions; some of them have been discussed by the editors.

2. those that are not revealed by ms. evidence and hence form part of the constituted text but are quite obvious due to contradictions in consecutive stanzas.

3. those revealed either by contradictions that are not so obvious because they are not found in consecutive passages but are found in the text as a whole, or by the criterion of intrinsic probability.

I begin with some examples of the first kind, i.e. those which have been already characterized as interpolations and do not occur in the text of critical editions. Although they have been long recognized as interpolations, I mention them again because they are so deeply impressed on the popular mind that even after some fifty to sixty years have passed since the publication of the parvans in which they are found, they still continue to haunt the public mind.

One such example is related to the svayamvara of Draupādi. It is popularly believed that when Karna lifted the bow and was about to shoot the arrow to hit the target, Draupādi loudly declared that she would not choose a sūta for her husband: 

\[ \text{dṛṣṭवa tām draupādi vākyam uccair jagāda nāham varayāṁi sūtam} \] 1.1827*, p.725). On hearing it, Karna threw down the bow and, downcast, retired from the contest.

---

12 This task has been characterized as the application of “higher criticism” to the text. See F. Edgerton, Introduction to Sābhā-parvan, p. XXXIII.

13 They are found in the footnotes or appendices to the critical editions; some of them have been discussed by the editors.

14 These too have been pointed out by the editors in their introductions to respective parvans.

15 These have not been noted as spurious so far.

16 Ādiparvan was published in 1933, Aranyakā in 1943, and Drona in 1958. The examples given below are from these parvans.
This stanza does not occur at all in the entire Southern recension, and among the versions of the Northern recension, it does not occur in the Kashmiri, Maithili and Bengali versions. It is found only in four Devanāgarī mss. (out of a total fourteen used for the critical edition), and one (out of three) Nepali ms. It is therefore clearly a very late addition to the text. Moreover, its spurious nature is revealed also by other considerations. It contradicts certain other passages in the epic. In the first instance, Karna attended the svayamvara along with Duryodhana and other Kurus, because he must have been invited to it by Drupada. That means he was not considered unqualified by Drupada to take part in the contest (duryodhanapurogāś ca sakarnath kuravo nṛpa... samupāgaman 1.176.14; kṛṣṇena sahitā virāś ivadarthāṁ samupāgaitāḥ 1.77.4). Next, Yuddhiṣṭhira told the Purohita of Drupada that when the pāṇa for the svayamvara was declared, no restriction was mentioned regarding the varṇa, gotra, family, or vocation of the suitor (na tatra varṇesu kṛtā vivakṣā na jīvaśilpe na kule na gotre 1. 85.23). That meant that Draupadī was just viryaśulkā and hence she could not lay down any condition. But most important of all, Karna is specifically mentioned in a stanza which names a few kings who tried their hand at the bow, but had failed (yat karnaśalyapramukhaiḥ pārthivair lokaviśrutaiḥ / nānataṁ balavadbhīr hi dhanurvedaparāyanaiḥ // 1.179.4). Hence, if Karna had once tried his hand and had failed there was no question of his trying again and Draupadī objecting to it. The passage is thus a clear addition to the received text.17

The second instance is from the account of the killing of Jayadratha. Again, it is popularly believed that in order to deceive Jayadratha, Kṛṣṇa made use of some kind of device to conceal the sun and produce the impression of sunset. The Southern recension as a whole refers to this device vaguely as upāya (srakṛṣyānty aham upāyam tam ādityasyāpavārane 7. 1009*). This upāya is further made clear in the Telugu version and in most of the Grantha manuscripts but it does not occur at all in the Malayalam version of the Southern recension. According to the additional information provided by the Telugu and the Grantha versions, Kṛṣṇa ordered his sudarśana cakra to cover the sun with darkness and produce the impression of sunset (astam gatam ivādityam tamastā chādayeti vai 7.1010*). On the other hand, in the north, only the Bengali and the Devanāgarī versions, tell us that Kṛṣṇa used some kind of yoga to cover the sun (yogam atra vidhāsyāmi

---

17 For the comments of V. S. Sukthankar on this subject see Prolegomena to Ādi, p. LXI.
The references to Kṛṣṇa's intervention are, thus, not only not found in all the versions (it is absent in any form in the Kashmiri version\textsuperscript{18}), but also that they are not uniform. The conclusion about their spurious nature arrived at on the basis of the manuscript evidence is confirmed by the fact that these passages contradict the account of Jayadratha's killing given in other stanzas which are uniformly found in all the versions. Those stanzas tell us that Arjuna succeeded in defeating all heroes who tried to obstruct his way to Jayadratha. He engaged Jayadratha in a duel when advancing towards the west, the sun, though was clearly visible in the sky. The duel lasted for some time in which Arjuna felled down the opponent's flagstaff and killed his charioteer. By this time the sun had further advanced to the west. Hence, Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna not to waste any more time but kill Jayadratha straightaway. Arjuna acted on Kṛṣṇa's advice and with his very next arrow cut off the head of Jayadratha. There was still some time left before the sunset, so that the army of the Pandavas could attack Drona (tataḥ pravartte rājjan astāṃ gacchati bhāskare / dronasya somakaìḥ sārdham samgūmo lomaharsanaḥ 7.121.45). Since Arjuna had thus enough time at his disposal to kill Jayadratha before sunset, there was no question of Kṛṣṇa using his yoga or any other device (upāya) like sudarśana cakra to cover the sun.

To give just one more example of this nature, I may recall the incident in which Urvāṣī is said to have approached Arjuna during his stay in heaven. The incident is reported in the entire southern recension and only in the Bengali and the Devanāgarī versions of the north, but is absent in the Kashmiri version. We are told that once Indra had noticed Arjuna paying special attention to Urvāṣī (pārthasya ca ksur urvaśyāṁ saktam vijnāya vāsāvah). Hence he asked Citrasena to tell Urvāṣī to pay a visit to Arjuna one evening. Accordingly she went to Arjuna but he refused to be attracted by her. Enraged, she cursed Arjuna to live like a eunuch. She did not specify the duration of the effect of her curse. When the incident was reported to Indra, he consoled Arjuna by saying that the curse would help him to live like a Brāhmaṇā during his term of ajñātavāśa. Thus it was Indra who restricted the effect of the curse to one year (3. App. I. no. 6. pp. 1047-1053).

This incident also contradicts a later statement by Arjuna in the Virāṭaparvan. According to it Arjuna had revealed to Uttara that although he

\textsuperscript{18} The Nepali and the Maithili versions of the Drona parvan are not available.
was pretending to be a eunuch, he was really not so. He was only practising a vrata for a year (saniyatsaram idam vratam / carami brahmacaryam vai saryam etad bravimi tel/ nasmikillo mahdbaho.... 4. 40.12-13).

The whole Urvasi incident is very strange. Instead of being pleased with Arjuna for his self-control and reward him, Urvasi cursed him. This is clearly an example of an early instance of the motif of scorned love which is found in the Buddhist and the Jain narrative literature and then also in later Brahmanical literature.19

There are many examples of interpolations of this type which are thus excluded from the constituted text on the basis of manuscript evidence. Not all of them, however, involve internal contradictions as in the above examples. To give only one example of this nature, one may recall the incident of the sage Durvásas reported in the Āranyakaparvan. We are told that the sage Durvásas was sent, along with his one thousand disciples, to the Pándavas by Duryodhana. The sage was to ask for food when Draupadi had cleansed her sthālī, which provided food as desired, and kept it aside. She could not then serve food to Durvásas and his pupils. Duryodhana anticipated that the enraged sage would curse the Pándavas. However, Kṛṣṇa came to the rescue of the Pándavas. Durvásas and his disciples, when they were bathing in the river, felt satiated and, afraid of inviting the wrath of Yudhiṣṭhira, they all fled. The incident is reported in a lengthy passage found only in a few Devanāgarī mss. (including that of Nilakantha and Caturbhujā) and in one Grantha ms. It is absent in all other versions.20

We may now turn to the second kind of interpolations which are admitted into the constituted text since they occur uniformly without exception in all the versions of the Mbh.


20 3. App. 1. 25 (pp. 1080-1084); also a very short version of ten lines in only one Devanāgarī ms. App. 1.30 (p. 1087). For V. S. Sukthankar's observations, see Introduction to Āranyakaparvan, p. XXV.
An example of an interpolation revealed due to contradiction in two consecutive stanzas occurs in the SabhaParvan. After the game of dice, Duryodhana sent his messenger to Draupadi to take her to the dāsi of the Kauravas to do menial work (2.59.1; 2.60.4). When Draupadi refused and instead raised the question about her status as a dāsi, Duryodhana asked the same messenger to go to her again this time to bring her to the sabhā to get the answer to her question. The messenger accordingly went to her and told her Duryodhana’s message. Draupadi apparently was in no mood to act according to Duryodhana’s wish. Now instead of hearing about a clear refusal by Draupadi and the messenger’s return to the sabhā without her, what we actually hear in a couple of stanzas is that Yudhishtira having come to know what Duryodhana desired sent a messenger, acceptable to Draupadi, and she, without hesitation, came to the assembly and stood before her father-in-law (sabhām āgamya pāncālī śvaśurasyāgrato 'bhavat (2.60.15). And in spite of the fact that Draupadi was then already present in the assembly, to our surprise, we are informed once again that Duryodhana asked his messenger to go to Draupadi to get her to the sabhā (ihaiva tām ānaya prātiśkāmin pratyakṣam asyāḥ kuravo bruvantu 2.60.16). There is thus a contradiction between two passages. If the one has place in the text, the other should not. And yet the editor has admitted both the passages of contradictory reports in the constituted text since they occur uniformly in all the versions of the epic. 21 In this case, it may be noted, that the contradiction is the result not of the inventor’s adding something of his own, but it is due to the fact that the narrator has introduced into his version a couple of stanzas from an altogether different version of the incident. It is a case of conflation of two different reports. 22

Another similar example is from the Adiparvan. It is usually believed that Mādrī committed satī after the death of Pāṇḍu. In support of this belief we have a specific statement in the Mbh. which occurs without exception in all the versions and hence forms part of the constituted text. That statement tells us very clearly that Mādrī mounted the funeral pyre of Pāṇḍu and burnt herself with him. (tāṁ citāgatam ājñāya vairānāramukhe hutam / praviśtā pāvakaṁ mādrī hitvā jīvitam ātmanah 1.117.28; also 1.116.31). However, it is not so well known that immediately after this stanza we have another one which also occurs in all the versions and hence forms part of the constituted

21 For the observations of F. Edgerton see his Introduction to the Sabha, pp. XXXI-XXXII.
22 It may be noted that in the version according to which Draupadi came to the sabhā of her own accord, there is no room for her harassment by Duhṣasana as is found in the well known version.
text. The latter stanza directly contradicts what is said in the preceding stanza. According to this stanza the sages who, after the death of Pāṇḍu, brought Kunti and the young Pāṇḍavas to Hāstinapura, also brought with them the two dead bodies of Pāṇḍu and Madri. They handed them over to the elders of the Kauravas and asked them to perform the due funeral rites (ime tayoh sarīre āve... pretakārye ca nirvṛtte pitramedham mahāyasāh! labhatāṁ... pāṇḍuḥ... / 1.117.30-31). Then, in the following adhyāya (1.118) we have a detailed description of the cremation of Pāṇḍu and Madri. Both these accounts could not be true at the same time. Either Pāṇḍu was cremated on the Śataśṛiga mountain and Madri mounted the funeral pyre, or cremation did not take place and the dead bodies were brought to Hāstinapura. Nilakanṭha’s feeble attempt to remove the contradiction by interpreting sarīra ‘body’ as asthi ‘bone’ is not convincing. Sukthankar, following Hopkins, has already expressed his dissatisfaction with Nilakanṭha’s explanation. Clearly here, as in the above case, we have conflation of two different accounts of the same incident. The interpolator while borrowing stanzas from a different account and inserting them in his own has shown scant regard for the contradiction his interference with the received text involved.

We shall now consider the third kind of interpolations, viz. such as are revealed to be of doubtful nature due to internal contradiction or due to the criterion of intrinsic probability. The contradictions, however, are not obvious since they do not occur in the consecutive passages but are revealed by the study of different Adhyāyas in different parvans.

One example of such interpolation is related to the famous incident of the vow of Bhima to break the thigh of Duryodhana in the great war (2.63.14) and the curse of the sage Maitreya to the same effect (3.11.34). They, no doubt, occur in all the versions, but their spurious nature is revealed by the fact that in the entire account of the great war, no one, not even Bhima and Duryodhana, at any stage shows any awareness of either the vow or the curse.

23 In addition to what Sukthankar has said (Prolegomena to Ādi, pp. LXXXVII), I have given some more arguments for not accepting Nilakanṭha’s interpretation, cf. Proceedings of the National Seminar on Living Customs and their Ancient Indian Sources, Pune 1991, pp. 159-171.

24 Sukthankar does not express his opinion on which of the two accounts could be the original one. I have tried to show, on the basis of internal and external evidence, that the stanzas related to sarī are spurious, cf. Madhuvīdya (M. A. Mehendale: Collected Papers, 2001, pp. 481-482).

25 As, for example, in the interpolations discussed above of the second type.
Many warriors on the side of the Pândavas, during the first eighteen days of war, fought with Duryodhana with bow and arrows and no one, according to the war report, had tried to spare him simply because his thigh was to be broken by Bhima with gadā. In fact, Arjuna on two occasions agreed to kill Duryodhana with his arrows. The first occasion arose when Duryodhana tried to check Arjuna’s advance towards Jayadratha. Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna to kill Duryodhana and remove the very root of all wickedness (7.77.7, 10, 13, 17-18). Arjuna readily agreed to cut off the head of Duryodhana (chindyām mūrdhānam āhave 7.77.20). Later, after the fall of Śalya, Arjuna once again agreed to kill Duryodhana as suggested by Kṛṣṇa (9.26.8-9; 23-24). That Arjuna, on both those occasions did not succeed in killing Duryodhana for one reason or the other is a different matter. The point is, if Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had known about the vow and the curse, how could Kṛṣṇa suggest to kill Duryodhana and how could Arjuna agree to it? If Arjuna had succeeded in cutting off the head of Duryodhana with his arrow, there would have been no chance for Bhima to fulfil his vow to break the thigh with gadā, nor for the curse of Maitreyā to prove true.

Next, let us see if Yudhiṣṭhira at any stage shows awareness of the vow or the curse. He too disappoints us. When Yudhiṣṭhira challenged Duryodhana to come out of the pond and face the Pândavas, he permitted him not only to fight with the weapon of his choice but also with any one of the Pândavas, not necessarily Bhima. If Duryodhana chose, Yudhiṣṭhira offered to fight with him (9.31.24-25). All this is very strange. If Bhima had vowed to break the thigh, all that Yudhiṣṭhira should have done is to ask Duryodhana to come out of the pond and have a gadāyuddha with Bhima.

Coming to Draupādi, we do not find her making a reference to Bhima’s vow. When Kṛṣṇa was to leave for Hastinapura to make a final bid to avoid the war, she did not approve of his mission. She wanted a war in which she could see the uprooted arm of Duḥśāsana lying on the ground smeared with dust. (duḥśāsanabhujaṁ śyāmam saṁchinnam pāṁṣugunthinam | yady aham taṁ na paśyāmi kā śāṁtri hṛdayasya me || 5.80.39). But there is no similar word from her about the hated thigh of Duryodhana.

Finally, we note that neither Bhima nor Duryodhana, the two most important characters directly concerned with the vow and the curse, shows any knowledge of them.
As to Bhima, to begin with, let us note that surprisingly he too pleaded with Kṛṣṇa to see if the war with the Kauravas could be avoided. How could Bhima do that if he had vowed to break the thigh in the war? But apart from it, during the long reporting of the war lasting for eighteen days he is never shown eager to challenge Duryodhana for a duel with gadā to enable him to fulfil his vow. And when an occasion arose when he could have at least mentioned his vow, he did not do that. When Bhīma killed Duhsasana and fulfilled his vow concerning him, he declared that on that very day he would cut the limbs of Duryodhana like that of a sacrificial animal and give its offerings (adhyāiva dāsyāmy aparām dvitiyam duryodhanam yajñapaśūn viśasya 8.61.16). Instead of saying that, why did he not declare that on that very day he would break Duryodhana’s thigh to fulfil his second vow? In the description of the gadāyuddha proper, which is fairly long (9.56.1-67), there is nothing to suggest that Bhima was looking for an opportunity to break his opponent’s thigh. On the contrary he, as well as his opponent, was fighting strictly according to the rules. If one of them fell on the ground, the other did not rush to take undue advantage of the situation (as for instance the son of Duhsasana did when Abhimanyu fell on the ground 7.48.11-12), but allowed his opponent to stand up again to continue the fight.

At one stage, however, Bhima lost his armour due to Duryodhana’s hit. From that point onwards the situation became very grave for Bhīma. Noticing the danger Bhima faced, Kṛṣṇa thought it fit to intervene. He told Arjuna, sitting by his side, that if Bhima continued to fight as he did till that point strictly following the rules of the duel, there was absolutely no chance for him to win. Only if Bhima took recourse to some unlawful move, he could kill Duryodhana (bhīmasenas tu dharmena yudhyamāṇo na jeṣyati/ anyāyena tu yudhyan vai hanyād eṣa suyodhanam 9.57.4, 8, 17). What that unlawful move (anyāya) should be, Kṛṣṇa did not specify. It was Arjuna who, acting on Kṛṣṇa’s advice, did it. By stroking his own thigh with his hand, he suggested to Bhima to hit his gadā at Duryodhana’s thigh. In the given situation, that was probably the only kind of unjust act which Arjuna could suggest to Bhima without any one else noticing it. Bhima understood the hint correctly and immediately after that when he got the opportunity he hurled his gadā at Duryodhana’s thigh who, to be sure, never expected Bhima to do anything of the sort. As a result, Duryodhana

---

26 It may also be noted that on occasions Bhima spoke of killing Duryodhana with his gadā but never of breaking his thigh (5.72.13-14).
fell on the ground without any possibility of getting up again to continue the fight.

This is how the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana came to an end. Bhima hurled his mace at Duryodhana’s thigh, neither because he had vowed to do that, nor because that was how Maitreya had cursed Duryodhana, but because there was no other option left for him. The incidents of the vow and the curse are therefore to be judged as later additions inserted in the epic obviously to absolve Bhima from the guilt of doing an improper act. 27

Duryodhana, the victim of the unjust act, too does not seem to be aware of the vow or the curse. On one occasion, while sending a message to the Pândavas through Sakuni’s son Ulūka, he challenged Bhima to fulfil his vow regarding Duhsásana, but made no reference at all to the other vow of breaking the thigh (duhsásanasya rudhiram piyatâm yadi śakyate 5.157.17; 5.158.10). This is very strange if Duryodhana had any knowledge about the vow.

The Pândavas too in their spirited reply assured Duryodhana that Bhima would most certainly drink the blood of Duhsásana but, strangely, they did not say a word about the vow of breaking the thigh (duhsásanasya rudhiram pitam ity avadhāryatām 5. 159.12).

27 It has been said above that none of the characters shows any awareness of the vow or the curse. There is however one exception. Kṛṣṇa on two occasions made mention of them. In the first instance, after he drew Arjuna’s attention to the fact that Bhima had no option but to take recourse to some unlawful act he, as an afterthought, mentioned that Bhima had vowed to break Duryodhana’s thigh (pratijñātam tu bhimena dyātakāle dhanānājaya / ārūḍ bhetsyāmi te sankhye gadayeti suyodhana // 9.57.6). But even after that, he pointed out that if Bhima were to continue to fight according to the rules and relying on his strength, Yudhiṣṭhira would be placed in an adverse situation (yady esa balam āsthāya nyāyena praharīyatāv/ viṣamasthas tato rājā bhavisyayati yudhisṭhrah // 9.57.8). This means that Kṛṣṇa would have certainly preferred if Bhima could come out victorious without doing anything wrong. But since that was not possible he should fulfil his vow! This is very strange. And more important is the fact that if at all Bhima had taken the vow, it would not have been necessary to remind him about it. The next occasion arose when, after the fall of Duryodhana, the enraged Balarāma rushed towards Bhima. While trying to pacify his anger Kṛṣṇa reminded Balarāma of the vow of Bhima, and, in addition, mentioned also the curse of Maitreya (which he did not do on the earlier occasion) (suyodhanaśya gadaya bhaktaṁśmy ārūḍ mahāhāve / iti pūrvaṁ pratijñātam bhimena hi sabbhāte // maitreyenabhīṣaptat ca pūrvaṁ eva mahārṣinaḥ / ārūḍhetsyaṁ te bhima gadyayeti paraṅstapa // 9.59.14-15, 24). Kṛṣṇa further pointed out to Balarāma that the Pândavas were bound to them by nuptial and friendly ties (9.59.16). This additional pleading becomes irrelevant if the vow and the curse were facts. The secondary nature of these verses in quite clear.
In the actual duel that occurred, Duryodhana is never shown as taking extra care to guard his thighs. In fact, he had no need to do that since Bhima was fighting all along according to the rules which meant the part of his body below the navel was safe. That must be the reason why he jumped up in the sky in order to avoid Bhima's final and fatal hit. He was unaware that in the meantime Bhima had changed his mind and had decided to break the rules to bring his opponent down. His jumping up and thereby exposing the thighs gave a splendid opportunity to Bhima which he did not miss. He hurled his mace aiming at the exposed thighs and broke them.

Since no one involved in the war ever knew of the vow or the curse, the two incidents are incompatible with the rest of the account in the Mbh. They have therefore to be judged as interpolations invented by the narrator and added to his text.

Another interpolation, not noticed so far, occurs in the Āśvamedhika parvan (14.59-60). After the war, Kṛṣṇa returned to Dvārakā. Vasudeva asked Kṛṣṇa to give him a brief account of the war telling him exactly what had happened. Kṛṣṇa was best qualified to do that since he was a witness to the war incidents and was also famous for his true speech (tvam hi prayāksadarsī ca kāryajñāś ca mahābhujal tasmāt prabrūhi samgrāmam yāḥtāthathyena me 'naghal/ 14. 59. 2; nanu tvam pūndarīkāśa satyavāg bhuvā viśrutāḥ 14. 60. 7). Kṛṣṇa's report is extremely short making up some 56 stanzas (14. 59. 6-35; 14. 60. 16-41). It is surprising to notice certain glaring discrepancies between his brief account and the earlier detailed account of Saṁjaya.28

The first discrepancy in Kṛṣṇa's account concerns the generals who led the Pāṇḍava army during the eighteen days of war. According to Saṁjaya, it was Dhrṣṭadyumna who alone led the Pāṇḍeva army for all the eighteen days. The Kauravas, however, had to change their generals one after the other. Surprisingly, according to Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas too changed their generals to correspond to the changes made by their opponents. Thus, the Pāṇḍavas had four generals Śiśkhandin, Dhrṣṭadyumna, Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira (14. 59. 9, 15, 20, 23). This deviation is clearly of a secondary nature since it shows

28 Both Kṛṣṇa and Saṁjaya could not have been witnesses to all the incidents of the war. Some they saw, others they heard from other heroes or from war reporters. Hence it would not be very strange if the discrepancies in the two accounts were of a minor nature. But that is not the case.
advance knowledge on the part of the Pāṇḍavas regarding their heroes who were to kill their opposite numbers and hence made them generals.

The next deviation is related to the death of Drona. Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Drona was overpowered by Dhṛṣṭadyumna since he was extremely tired (tato dronah pariśrānto dhṛṣṭadyumnavaśaṁ gataḥ 14.59.18). This is very different from what Saṁjaya reported to Dhrītarāṣṭra. According to that report, Dhṛṣṭadyumna overpowered Drona only when he laid down his arms and not because he was tired (7.165.34-37, 52-54).29

A similar deviation is related to the fall of Karna. Kṛṣṇa grossly underrated Karna’s valour when he said that Karna died like a moth when it came in contact with fire (tataḥ pṛthāṁ samāsādyā pataṁgaiva paviṣñam pañcaivam agamaṁ saurir... 14.59.21). As a matter fact, Karna fought very bravely even after his wheel got stuck in a crevice. (8.66.45-59; 8.67.8-14). In that short-lived final duel, Kṛṣṇa once observed that Karna as though swallowed Arjuna’s arrows (rādheyo grasate śarān 8.66.52) and also that Arjuna was afflicted by the arrows of Karna (kānaśtrēnābhiḍītāṁ 8.66.57). Certainly a moth does not do that to a flame of fire!

Kṛṣṇa’s account of the fall of Duryodhana has two deviations when compared to that of Saṁjaya. In the first instance, he told Vasudeva that when Duryodhana left the battlefield Bhima ran after him and saw him hiding himself in a lake (tamanvadhāvat bhīmasenah... hrade... salilasthaṁ dadarśa ha 14.59.26-27). According to Saṁjaya’s account, nobody knew where Duryodhana was and it was Bhima’s hunters who gave Pāṇḍavas information about his hiding in a lake (9.28.25, 49-52; 9.29.5-6, 22-42). Secondly, Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Bhima killed Duryodhana by his valour. He made no mention of Bhima violating the rules of gadāyuddha and breaking the thighs of Duryodhana (tataḥ sa nihaas rājā... bhīmasenena vikramya 14.59.30).30

Finally, we may note the deviations in Kṛṣṇa’s reporting of the death of Abhimanyu. Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Abhimanyu was tired out by Drona and Karna and that was why he was overwhelmed by the son of

29 If Kṛṣṇa had desired to be brief and yet close to Saṁjaya’s account he could have said nyavastāstroḥ instead of pariśrāntah.
30 Even if Kṛṣṇa did not want to go into the details, he could have used the word vyutkravya, instead of vikramya, to indicate the violation of the rules.
Duḥśāsana (14. 60. 17, 20). According to Saṁjaya's account, Abhimanyu could have been certainly tired, but that was not because of Droṇa and Karna but because he had to fight with a number heroes before he encountered the son of Duḥśāsana. And just before the final dual, he had to face, not just Drona and Karna, but a group of six heroes of whom Drona and Karna were two (7. 47. 31-38; 7. 48. 21).\(^3\)

Krṣṇa made no mention of Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha. Instead, he told Vasudeva that Kunti consoled Subhadrā lamenting her son's death and that she also arranged for Abhimanyu's śrāddha. This cannot be true if we follow Saṁjaya's account. During the war, Kunti was all along at Hāṣṭinapura and not in the camp of the Pāṇḍavas to be able to console Subhadrā. It was Krṣṇa who consoled Subhadrā. There is also no mention of the śrāddha of Abhimanyu as, in fact, there is no mention of any other śrāddha during the war in Saṁjaya's account.

All these deviations are such as could not have been invented by the narrator. They seem to have been taken over from an account of the war different in many points from that of Vaiśampāyana.

A third instance of an interpolation which also points to quite a different narration of the Mbh. from the one known to us is related to the basic incident of the epic narrative viz. the game of dice. One such variation was already noticed above. It concerned Draupadi's arrival in the sabhā – did she go there of her own accord or was she forced to go by Duḥśāsana? (p. 8).

There is another variation in the narration of the game of dice which has not been noticed so far. How did Yudhīṣṭhira lose the Pāṇḍavas in the game?

According to the known version, Yudhīṣṭhira staked his four brothers, one after the other, and then staked himself. The declaration of each stake was immediately followed by the game related to it. Yudhīṣṭhira lost all those five games and thus all the Pāṇḍavas became dāsas (2. 58. 11-28).

---

31 There was certainly a brief consultation between Droṇa and Karna before Abhimanyu had to face the six heroes 7. 47. 26-30. But that does not mean that only those two tired Abhimanyu out.
Then Śakuni, in two stanzas 2.58.29 and 31, suggested to Yudhiṣṭhira to stake Draupadi. These two stanzas should have occurred consecutively one after the other, but in the available text we find a stanza inserted between the two (2.58.30) which not only breaks the smooth narration of the event but is also out of the context. It tells us that Śakuni, the skilled gambler, won the Pāṇḍavas all of whom stood as stakes by throwing dice separately for each one of them (evam uktvā32 matākṣas tān glahe sarvān avasṭhitān / prājayal lokavīrān āksepēṇa prīhak prīhak//). This information is not only superfluous because it tells us what has been already told before, but its import gives quite a different account of the manner by which the Pāṇḍavas were staked and lost.

The known account has been told above. According to this stanza, however first only the stakes of all the Pāṇḍavas were declared one after the other and when this declaration of all the five stakes was over, Śakuni played five different games one after the other related to those stakes. In the known account the sequence of the events was: the declaration of a stake immediately followed by the game related to it; according to the stanza 2.58.30 the sequence was: first the the declaration of all five stakes and then the five games related to them.

The stanza 2.58.30 is therefor clearly a later addition made by the narrator by borrowing it from some different account of the game of dice.

But the most starting variation is related to the initiative taken by Yudhiṣṭhira for the game of dice. This startling information is found at two places: in the second Adhyāya of the Udyogaparvan and in the twenty-eighth Adhyāya of the Āraṇyakaparvan. We are told in the Udyogaparvan that at a meeting held in the court of Virāta, Krṣṇa suggested to send a messenger to the Kauravas to find out what their intention was. Balarāma agreed, but added that as far as the game of dice was concerned it was all Yudhiṣṭhira’s doing and no blame attached to Śakuni. It was Yudhiṣṭhira who insisted on playing dice when all the senior Kuruś friends present in the Sabhā tried to dissuade him. Although himself not an expert player (ataijñah), he dared challenge Śakuni who was known for his skill with the dice (matākṣah). Yudhiṣṭhira could have challenged any other gambler present in the Sabhā (durodarās tatra sahasrāso ‘nye). And on top of that all he did not stop at any stage during

32 The words evam uktvā which occur at the beginning of the stanza also show that it stands out of the context. What follows in the stanza has nothing to do with what Śakuni had said in the preceding stanza 29.
the game though he was constantly losing, but went on to play till the bitter end. Thus from the beginning of the end the entire blame lay at the doors of Yudhiṣṭhira and no to blame came to Śakuni (tatrāparādho śākuner na kaś cīt 5.2. 9-11).

The above account presents to us quite a different image of Yudhiṣṭhira. According to the known account, the game was not played on Yudhiṣṭhira’s initiative. It was Dhṛtarāṣṭra who invited Yudhiṣṭhira for a friendly game of dice (suhrddyata 2.51.21, 52.8). Before the start of the game Duryodhana suggested that Śakuni would play in his stead (2.53.15-16). Yudhiṣṭhira had thus to play with Śakuni not because he challenged him but because that was the arrangement suggested by Duryodhana. Yudhiṣṭhira in fact had declared that he would not challenge any one for the game but, if challenged, he would not refuse (2.52.16; 2.53.13). The compulsion of the game was thus not Yudhiṣṭhira’s excessive fondness for it but the invitation received by him from the Kauravas. The only point in which the two accounts agree is that Yudhiṣṭhira did not retire from the game at any stage.

The above account of Balarāma is not only confirmed but also reinforced by Yudhiṣṭhira’s our admission which is found in the Aranyakaparvan. A repentant Yudhiṣṭhira one evening (3.28. 1) admitted to his brothers and to Draupadī his fault. He began by admitting that it was on account of his improper conduct that calamity had overtaken them all (mamānaye dhi vyasanāṁ va ēgāt 3.35. 1). He explained the anaya by adding: “I myself proposed a game of dice and challenged Duryodhana in order to deprive him of his kingdom with all its countries (ahāṁ hi aksan anvapadyam jhīrṣan rājyam sarāṣṭram dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāt 3.35. 2). At that time Śakuni came forward to play for Duryodhana. Seeing that the number of dice at each game turned out to be exactly as desired by Śakuni, I could have controlled myself. But fury deprives a man of his calmness (aṅśāṁ hi dṛṣṭvā śakuner yathāvata kāmānulomān ayujo ‘yujaś ca / śakunāni vyantum abhaviṣyad ātmā manyuṣ tu hanti puruṣasya dhairyaṁ 3.35. 4).

Yudhiṣṭhira’s confession agrees with the account of Balarāma in all respects except that according to Yudhiṣṭhira he did not directly challenge Śakuni. It is implied that he challenged Duryodhana, but since Śakuni stepped forward to play in place of Duryodhana he had to play with him. Yudhiṣṭhira, in addition, gave the reason why he wanted to play the game and this, of course, Balarāma could not have known. The reason given by Yudhiṣṭhira is unbelievable for any reader of Vaiṣṇavipāyana’s version of the epic. No one can
entertain even for a moment the idea that Yudhishtira wanted to deprive Duryodhana of his kingdom. On the other hand, following Vaiśampāyana's version, any reader knows that it was Duryodhana who, out of jealousy for the vast wealth accumulated by the Pāṇḍavas, wished to deprive them of their riches. Sakuni suggested to him the game of dice for this purpose and the game was played.

The stanzas of Balarāma in the Udyogaparvan (5.2.9-11) and those of Yudhishtira in the Aranyakaparvan (3.35.2-4) have therefore to be judged as borrowed from some other version of the epic poem. They do not appear to be such as were invented by some narrator and interpolated into his text.

We now come to an instance of an interpolation, which could be an innovation of some narrator of the poem. It need not be a case of borrowing from another version.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked Samjaya: who struck first, my warriors or those of the Pāṇḍavas? (6.22.18). The account of the war then should have followed. But the Gītā intervenes, and at the end of it Arjuna became ready to fight (6.23-6.40). Now at least with the next adhyāya (41) the war description should have begun. But again it does not. It begins actually with adhyāya 42. The intervening adhyāya 41 reports a very strange and most ridiculous incident.

Just when the first arrow was about to be shot Yudhishtira, we are told, got down from his chariot, dropped his armour and weapons and, with folded hands, started on foot towards the chariot of Bhīṣma. The rest of the Pāṇḍavas, confounded, and Kṛṣṇa followed suit. Many other kings did the same. the Pāṇḍavas asked Yudhishtira the meaning of his curious behaviour, but he would not reply. Kṛṣṇa, then, told them that Yudhishtira was proceeding to Bhīṣma, Drona and other elders on the opposite side to seek their permission to fight.33 Yudhishtira did go to Bhīṣma and sought his permission. He did not stop there. When he was granted a boon by Bhīṣma, Yudhishtira asked him how the Pāṇḍavas could defeat him. This he asked within the hearing of all those who could listen to the conversation. Samjaya too could

33 In justification to Yudhishtira's behaviour Kṛṣṇa said that if a person went to battle without taking permission of the elders he was despised by them (6.41.18-19). But this should surely be applicable to the elders on one's own side and not to those on the opposite side and that too on the battlefield just before the start of the war!
listen to it to report it later to Dhr̥tarāṣṭra. Bhīṣma hesitated to reveal immediately the secret of his defeat but promised to do that later. Yudhīṣṭhira next approached Droṇa. Everything happened exactly as before, the only difference was that in the case of Droṇa, Yudhīṣṭhira did not just ask how to defeat him, but went a step further and asked how to kill him (vadhopāyam vadamānaḥ 6.41.58). Droṇa did not hesitate like Bhīṣma and straightaway told him that any one could kill him once he had laid down the arms after learning some extremely bad news from a person whom he could trust (śastrāṁ cāham rane jahyāṁ śrutvā sumahad aprīyaṁ ! śraddheyavākyāt purusād etat satyam bravimī tē 6.4.61). When Yudhīṣṭhira next met Krpa, after completing the initial formalities, he did not ask him either how to defeat him or how to kill him. He just kept quiet. Krpa, who in all probability had heard what had happened in Yudhīṣṭhira’s earlier meetings with Bhīṣma and Droṇa, told him without his asking that he could never be killed (avadhyaḥ haṁ mahipāla 6.41.69). The meeting ended there, and Yudhīṣṭhira approached Śalya. He requested Śalya that later in the war when he would become the charioteer of Karna he should lower Karna’s spirits (sūtpatrasya saṅgrāme kāryo tajovadhas tvayā 6.41.81). After getting this assurance from Śalya, Yudhīṣṭhira returned to his side.

This long episode of seventyeight stanzas (6.41.6-83) is clearly of a secondary nature. Its spurious nature is revealed by the fact that it shows advance knowledge on the part of the inventor of events which took place later during the war. Everything happens later exactly as foreseen here. The incident is also intrinsically improbable. It is impossible to believe that Yudhīṣṭhira put such questions and make request to the leaders of the opponents on the battlefield. The replies given and the request agreed to by the leaders amount to treason. It is surprising that Duryodhana did not object immediately to what had happened. Later during the war, Duryodhana is occasionally seen finding fault with Bhīṣma and Droṇa for not fighting seriously with the Pāṇḍavas, but he never utters a word of reproach about their objectionable behaviour as reported in the above episode.

The four episodes, detailed above, although they form part of the constituted text since they occur in all versions alike, are of spurious nature.

34 And this he did on the night of the ninth day of the war (6.103.50-82).
35 The only thing that remained to be asked by Yudhīṣṭhira was the exact nature of ‘the extremely bad news’ which would lead Droṇa to lay down arms.
The first three are not compatible with the information found elsewhere in the epic and the fourth is intrinsically improbable. Whereas the first and the fourth could be easily looked upon as additions made by the narrators themselves, the second and the third are more likely to be borrowings from some other version of the epic not otherwise known to us.