

Aswamedha Episode and Jaimini Bharata in the Tradition of Mahabharata : Bengali, Assamese and Oriya Version

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As the ancient tradition / heritage of **Mahabharata** shows, there is a special attraction for the *Aswamedha canto* (the chapter dealing with the ritual done with great fan-fare and the concomitant show-down of valour and strength in the great Indian Epic) across the entire stretch of Eastern India. Apart from the **Mahabharata** being compared in different regional languages of India, a plethora of precious creative pieces have come up in Assamese, Oriya, Bengali and Manipuri especially on the theme of *Aswamedha Yajna*. It is greatly interesting to observe that the entire medieval royal culture and court tradition was incomplete without this *Aswamedha canto* being recited in the open Parliament to the king, the courtiers and the public. The reason is obvious. This chapter or canto of the **Mahabharata** gives an exhaustive account of the tragic aftermath of the Great War and the noble intention of the virtuous Pandavas to atone for the loss of lives in the process of the war before restoring normalcy in society.

Apart from the fact that the **Mahabharata** war (or any other war for that matter) involved mass killings, it witnessed the brutal killing of one's own kith and kin, first cousins, nephews, mentors and friends. Hence, the *Pandavas* were declared victorious at the end of the day though, they were heavily shocked with grief and remorse and found it difficult to get over them. As a matter of fact, even as wise and as

balanced a character as *Dharmaraj Yudhisthira* was in no better frame of mind. Gloom and dejection hit one and all. Each of the *Pandavas* was down with utter confusion and self-pity and saw no way to come to terms with reality. At moments they thought of renouncing the world or even committing suicide. It was a state of terrible crisis for the whole nation when it was barely out of a disastrous war and with no one around in a sound frame of mind to lead the country out of turmoil. When the crisis deepened day by day and there was no sign of improvement, both great *Vyasadev* and *Narada* came to the rescue of *Dharmaraj Yudhisthira*. As per their advice and counseling the *Pandavas* organized the grand ritual of the *Aswamedha Yajna* to spiritually counter-act the nagging remorse and gloom. And indeed, they could fight out their dejection and disillusionment at last.

On the other hand, the *Aswamedha Parva* of the great Indian epic gives an elaborate account of the political situation of India during the period immediately following the **Mahabharata** war, the alignment of the royal houses, their powers and, above all, their attitude to the new order under the leadership of the *Pandavas*. The war-sick and the war-ravaged medieval kings of the Indian sub-continent thus found this chapter greatly soothing and entertaining. Even the non-Hindu, foreign invaders like the *Mughals* patronized the poets to write on

this theme of Aswamedha Yajna. This precisely explains why the Aswamedha Parva proved itself as the most recited, discussed and sought-after part of the great Indian epic which passed through innumerable poetic hands and appeared in innumerable creative forms. It drew the attention and fired the imagination of both the sovereigns and the common; the old and the young; the Hindus and the non-Hindus; the natives and the foreigners.

The earliest account of Aswamedha ritual we get from the Sanskrit **Mahabharata** composed by Vyasadeva. Later Rishi Jaimini, a student of Vyasa, composed a long narrative called **Jaimini Bharata** in which we find the ritual of Aswamedha yajna receiving the prime focus and all possible grandeur and significance. Next follows a phase of history when the great Indian epic takes multiple regional forms, each varying from the Sanskrit source and from each other as well in their thrust and approach. An interesting pattern, however, emerges in all their differences and varieties. Across Eastern India, the earliest attempt is found to be made to compose the **Mahabharata** in the regional language. And curiously, all these poets focus on the Aswamedha Parva primarily to entertain the kings and chieftains who mostly patronized such talents.

Let us first examine this great event as it is portrayed in the Sanskrit version of the epic. As the events proceed in the Sanskrit **Mahabharata**, after the disastrous war and the pyrrhic victory of the Pandavas in the great war Vyasadeva proposed king-designate Dharmaraj Yudhisthir to organize the Aswamedha Yajna (primarily to counter-act the deep-seated gloom and dejection from their mind) with two horses, one white the other dark. Arjun rode the white one following the dark one on its trail. First, the dark steed got into the territory of Trigarta and its king Suryavarma held up the horse. As a result, Arjun had a fight with king Suryavarma and his two brothers, Ketuvarma and Dhritavarma, in

which the three brothers were defeated. The next point that the dark horse found itself on its journey was the Sindhu province which was being ruled by Suratha, the able son of the deceased king Jayadratha. Both Suratha, the young king and his mother, the widow of king Jayadratha (who happened to be the sister of Duryodhana), got panicked and sought shelter with Arjun. From the Sindhu province the horse proceeded to the North-east province Manipur. Incidentally Manipur was being ruled by Babruvahana, the son of Arjun and princess Chitrangada, which Arjun himself wasn't aware of. Although Babruvahana accorded the best of reception and honour to Arjun the latter looked at such hospitality as a mark of cowardice and unheroic disposition. Arjun was really harsh and offensive to Babruvahana and in fact provoked him to a fight. This tense situation was further aggravated by Ullupi, the Nagakanya (snake-princess) from the nether-world. Then a terrible fight ensued between Arjun and Babruvahana in which the latter killed the former. After Arjun got killed both Ullupi and Chitrangada arrived on the spot. Chitrangada was crest-fallen to see Arjun dead and appealed to Ullupi to bring him back to life. On the other hand, Babruvahana (who too had lost his senses) on his recovery felt miserable and was filled with a terrible sense of guilt and remorse for being the cause of his own father's death. However, Ullupi, on the pitiful persuasion of Chitrangada, used *Sanjeevani* to bring the dead Arjun back to life. After this high drama was over Ullupi revealed the whole mystery how Arjun was cursed by the Astavasu for his unethical act of putting Shikhandi on the front and killing Bhishma who was without arm. The Astavasu had got the approval of mother Ganga before cursing Arjun. Somehow the Naga-princess Ullupi could know this well in advance and had approached her father, the king of the Nagas (Cobras), Ananta. The Naga king Ananta, however, had fervently requested the Astavasu to call back the curse they had inflicted upon Arjun. The Vasus had

complied with Nagaraj's request in a way by designing the killing of Arjun by his own son (Babruvahana) at Manipur and again getting back to life after his liberation from the impact of the curse. This whole trend and mystery was wonderfully narrated by Ullupi to Arjun which made him feel so happy. Then Arjun embraced and caressed his son Babruvahana and invited him to come to Hastinapur with both his mothers, Chitrangada and Ullupi.

After this high drama in Manipur the sacred horse entered the territory of Magadha where Arjun defeated the young king Meghasandhi, the grandson of Jarasandha. In the south Arjun defeated Sharabha, the son of Shisupal, in Shaktipur of the Chedis. In the same row Arjun went on defeating the Mlechha kings of Banga, Pundra and Koshala. Similarly, along the Coromandal and the Kankon coast Arjun fought and defeated the Dravidas, the Andhra, the Mahashika and the Kollwapineyas. Of course, there were many (such as Saurashtra, Gokarnadesha, Dwaravati Nagari, Panchanada Pradesh and Gandhara desha) who humbly accepted the sovereignty of the Pandavas and were invited to the Aswamedha Yajna. As the holy horse returned to Hastinapur after its long and eventful journey the Yajna was formally treated as over and then preparation was in full swing for the journey of the Pandavas to the Heaven (Swargarohana)(1).

In Sanskrit **Mahabharata** the love episode of Chitrangada and Arjun, their marriage and the birth of their son Babrunbahana, figure in the Adi Parva(2). Further, in the course of the Rajasuya Yajna Arjuna's reunion with Chitrangada in Manipur again and the former's invitation to Babruvahana to the Yajna is elaborately portrayed in the Sanskrit **Mahabharata**(3). Yet another relevant point mentioned in the Adi Parva of the Sanskrit **Mahabharata** is that Chitrabahana, the king of Manipur, had kept a condition before he agreed on the issue of Arjun-Chitrangada marriage

that the son of the couple would succeed to the throne of Manipur, not Hastinapur. As per this condition Babrunvahana became the king of Manipur and Chitrangada stayed back in Manipur to aid and advise her son like a regent(4). In the course of the Aswamedha yajna after the fight between Arjun and Babruvahana and the former's defeat and death and again his getting back to life and his reunion with his son and two wives (Chitrangada and Ullupi) Arjun directed Babruvahana to go to Hastinapur with his two mothers. As the Sanskrit **Mahabharata** further mentions, while Babruvahana finally leaves Hastinapur after his sojourn king Yudhishthira gives him a lot of wealth and gifts.(5)

In the Ashramika Parva of the Sanskrit **Mahabharata** it figures that while Gandhari with all the Kuru widows were leaving Hastinapur on their Vanaprastha (retirement to forest, the last phase of Vedic life) Chitrangada was very much present there.(6)

As such, in view of the above discussion we reasonably assume that Vyasadev has given special attention and importance to the entire Aswamedha parva in general and to Arjun-Chitrangada affair in particular. The histrionics of the situation and the excitement of winning war might have impressed the later kings and emperors who might be drawing ample vicarious pleasure from the fast-track dramatic sequence of events of the Aswamedha Parva. That partly explains why Jaimini Rishi claimed himself as a disciple of Vyasadev and composed **Jaimini Bharata** in the style of the Aswamedha Parva of Vyasa's Sanskrit **Mahabharata**. In the entire stretch of Eastern India **Jaimini Bharata** became greatly popular especially in the courts of kings and chieftains.

On closer examination we notice a few deviations in **Jaimini Bharata** from Vyasa's Sanskrit **Mahabharata**. For example, Vyasa mentions two holy horses (one white, the other dark) while Jaimini has only one white horse in his story. Further, as per the latter, this holy white

horse was recovered by Bhimasen defeating king Juvanaswa of Bhadravatipur (7).

Again, on the advice of Vyasadev Yudhisthir sent Bhimasen to invite and bring forth Sri Krsna and all his *Astapatavansis*. Sri Krsna's presence at Hastinapur made the Yajna smooth and easy(8).

Another deviation from **Jaimini Bharata** is the abduction of the holy horse by Anuswala, demon Salwa's brother, at the time of the initial ritual (*Vandapana*) before releasing the animal.

A new addition to the story-line by Jaimini is Sri Krsna's fight with the abductor Anuswala and His deliberate act of getting defeated and losing His senses. When Anuswala was begging apology for his insolence at the feet of Sri Krsna the latter revealed His Chaturdha Murati and Anuswala gave the holy Yajna horse back and sought shelter at His feet (9).

In the sequence of events as we see in **Jaimini Bharata**, the holy horse first enters the territory of king Neeladhawaja of Mahesmatipur. On the wise counsel of Agni, the son-in-law of king Neela Dhawaja, his son Pravira honorably returned the holy horse to the Pandavas as they were the committed followers of Bhagawan Sri Krsna. A series of interesting, yet complex chain of events are mentioned here in **Jaimini Mahabharata** how the daughter of king Neeladhawaja and Queen Jwalavati were getting married to Agni, his wife getting turned into a piece of stone being cursed by a Rishi along the Ganga, the holy Yajna horse getting stuck to that stone, on the touch of Arjun the horse being free and the cursed character (Chandi was her name) getting liberated simultaneously and so on and so forth. Next, the horse enters the Champak province. Here we get the story of Indumati and Sudhanwa. Sudhanwa got a protective ring (Kavacha) from Ganga with the help of Indumati. Finally, at the direction of Sri Krsna Arjun applied his Baishnavi

power and made Sudhanwa free. Suratha too was killed by a salvo from Arjun. At last, Hansadhawaja escorted the holy horse back to Hastinapur (10).

After this dramatic journey the Yajna horse enters the Pramila kingdom. That is a cursed land. It was Goddess Parvati who had crused her to be deprived of male companionship. The moment they saw Nara Narayan Arjun she was free from the curse instantly. On the counselling of Sri Krsna Arjun sent Pramila away to Hastinapur with his promise to marry her (11).

Then the horse gets into the land of the terrible demon (Ugra Rakshas). That is a strange country where human beings appear like fruits on trees in the noon hours and the carnivorous demons eat them. By the grace of Goddess Saraswati Arjun was successful in killing that terrible demon and could make the horse free(12).

Yet again, as **Jaimini Bharata** has it, on getting the news that the yajna horse has entered the borders of Manipur Babruvahana seeks the advice of his mother Chitrangada. As she suggests Babruvahana advances to receive his father (Arjun) with a rich array of gifts along with the holy horse. But Arjun offends Babruvahana calling him "the son of a harlot" that provokes the latter to go for a fight. As Jaimini relates, at the command of Sri Krsna, mother Ganga sits at the throat of Arjun and prevents him from recognizing his own son. Again, the same mother Ganga prevails upon Chitrangada that enrages her and becomes revengeful against her husband Arjun. Moreover, she blesses her son Babruvahana that turns his body as strong as thunder. On the other hand, Sri Krsna eludes Arjun whenever he tries to remember him before paying his obeisance to mother Ganga. As a result, Babruvahana, on the advice of Ullipi, begs the "power" from mother Ganga and with that kills Arjun. Then both Ullupi and Chitrangada arrive on the spot that gives a turn to the tragic sequence. Ullupi somehow realizes the blunder and sends Babruvahana to the nether- world where he had to fight and defeat

Dhrutarashtra (the minister of Nagaraj Ananta) and got the *Sanjeevani*.

Sri Krsna too arrives just on time. He comes with the severed head of Arjun which is stolen away by Dhritarashtra (Nagaraj Ananta's Minister), and with the touch of the *Sanjeevani* Arjun gets back his life. Brother Bhimasen and mother Kunti too arrive there. This part of the story is not there in Vyasa's Sanskrit **Mahabharata**. It is a wonderful family reunion. Both Ullipi and Chitrangada are cordially invited to Hastinapur. As the mystery slowly unfolds itself, all such complications and tragedy happen due to mother Ganga's curse. This secret was known to Ullipi alone. Hence she had advised Babruvahana to worship mother Ganga and seek her favour.

The holy horse of the Pandavas got into the city of Kantavati in the country of Shubhravativan on the borders of Manipur. The righteous king of that country Sikhidhwaja had in his life-time already performed seven Aswamedha Yajnas. Tamradhwaja was his eldest son. Both the father and son were committed/ avowed Vaisnavas. In the fight Tamradhwaja had defeated both Sri Krsna and Arjun and was carrying them on his shoulders to his father when both feigned unconscious. And both Sri Krsna and Arjun got into disguise and approached king Sikhidhwaja as two Brahmins. Sri Krsna, finally, was merciful enough to reveal Himself (in his Chaturdha Murati) before king Sikhidhwaja. After this obviously, the king and his retinue fell prostrate at the feet of the lord and returned the holy horse with profuse apology(14).

The next destination of the Yajna horse was Ratnapur which was being ruled by an able king Vira Varma. The five able sons of the king (Sulola, Suloka, Neela, Nakula etc.) launched an attack on Arjun and his army. Arjun, however, could make them flat and unconscious. After this Arjun had a fierce fight with the king's son-in-law Yamaraj. The latter too collapsed unconscious.

But when Arjun failed to defeat the king Vira Varma, Sri Krsna despatched Hanuman to tackle the situation. At last, the king took shelter at the feet of Sri Krsna and the lord was pleased to reveal His original form (Chaturdha Murati) to king Vira Varma. The high drama ended peacefully as the king returned the Yajna horse and accepted the lord's sovereignty(15).

The Yajna horse entered king Chandrahasa's territory of Kontala. He was the worthy son of king Sudhanya, His father had a notorious minister called Dhritabuddhi who had killed the king and forcibly occupied the throne. He too had tortured the prince and the king apparent, Chandrahasa. But at every point of his crisis Sri Krsna had come to his rescue. At last both Sri Krsna and Arjun were bound by a lasting friendship with Chandrahasa instead of fighting over the yajna horse. King Chandrahasa rather took it as a great privilege to hand over the holy animal to the Pandavas and got the rare favour of lord Sri Krsna's darshan and blessings(16).

In the course of its long journey the yajna horse reached the holy ashram of Rishi Bakadanta in an oceanic island. Both Sri Krsna and Arjun had given their darshan to Rishi Bakadanta earlier. In the next leg of the horse's journey, it entered Sindhu Desa where Suratha, the son of Jayadratha and his mother Dushila (Jayadratha's widow and the sister of Duryodhan), surrendered gracefully at the feet of Sri Krsna and Arjun(17). Then the great ritual of Aswamedha yajna came to an end and the Pandavas set out on their journey to the Heaven (Swargarohana) entrusting the throne to Parikshit.

The **Mahabharata** in Bengali shows many a deviation both from Vyasadev's Sanskrit **Mahabharata** and **Jaimini Bharata** as well. Let us briefly examine the highlights of the Aswamedha Parva of the Bengali **Mahabharata** with its similarities and departures.

As we go along the Aswamedha Yajna episode in the Bengali **Mahabharata** we observe

a striking similarity with the account given in **Jaimini Bharata**. The only remarkable difference is found in the complexion of the holy horse. The horse in Bengali **Mahabharata** is dark and its tail yellow(18).

While retrieving the yajna horse from Yuvanaswapur, its king was defeated who handed over the horse at Hastinapur where he availed himself the darshan of Sri Krsna. On his return to his kingdom the king proposed his old mother to avail the rare opportunity of the darshan of Sri Krsna which she turned down. Her son, the king (as the Bengali **Mahabharata** portrays), forcibly put her in the chariot and took her to Hastinapur for a darshan of Sri Krsna which comes rarely in a life-time. This anecdote is the only deviation in the Bengali **Mahabharata** from the **Jaimini Bharata**. The rest remains largely same, identical(19).

According to the Bengali **Mahabharata** only three persons (Sri Krsna, Uddhava and Krita Varma) had come from Dwarakapur in response to the invitation of king Yudhisthira to attend the Aswamedha Yajna(20). Whereas in **Jaimini Bharata** Sri Balaram and Sri Vasudeva too were in the company of Sri Krsna and others who came to Hastinapur.

As **Jaimini Bharata** puts it Anusalwa had abducted the Yajna horse only to get the darshan of Sri Krsna while fighting with him. This is well in consonance with the attitude and approach of the demons in Hindu myths and scriptures. They believe more in challenges than surrender even if it involves their matter of spiritual liberation.

Whereas in Bengali **Mahabharata** we get some other explanation. As it goes, Sri Krsna was under moral pressure and duress (as he was cursed by Garga Muni) to go for a fight with Anusalwa and to court defeat (21).

Both the Bengali **Mahabharata** and **Jaimini Bharata** mention that the holy horse first

entered Maheswatipur, the territory of king Neeladhwaaja. The only point both the accounts differ is on the name of the queen (Neeladhwaaja's). While the Bengali **Mahabharata** calls her *Janaa Jaimini Bharata* calls her as *Jwala* (22). Similarly, in Bengali **Mahabharata** the name of the queen of prince Pravira is Madana Manjari(23); whereas in **Jaimini Bharata** it is Prabhavati(24).

The wedding of the daughter of king Neeladhwaaja and queen Jwala receives different illustration in both the texts. In Bengali **Mahabharata** we get an elaborate account of the background and mystery of the wedding of Princess Swaha (the daughter of king Neeladhwaaja) with Agni. It depicts the fascinating account of how mother Vasumati felt jealous of Laxmi as all the time she was sitting on the lap of Sri Narayana. That enraged the latter who cursed Vasumati to take her birth as a mortal on earth. In turn Vasumati too cursed Laxmi for which Sri Narayan was forced to take incarnations on earth. This anecdote is only found in the Aswamedha Parva of the Bengali **Mahabharata**(25).

Both the texts, however, give an identical approach to the holy horse's entry into the Champak province of Karnataka. The only variation is marked on the matter of Indumati-Sudhanya affair which Bengali **Mahabharata** doesn't have (26). As **Jaimini Bharata** narrates, Surasen, the king of Karnataka, had a beautiful daughter called Indumati. She worshipped lord Viswanath with faith and devotion to get a very good husband. By the grace of lord Viswanath Indumati, on her way back from the temple, saw Sudhanya, the handsome and virtuous son of king Hansadhwaaja. At first sight Indumati was drawn to him and courted the Prince as her desired person. As Sudhanya was already married he turned down the offer but Indumati was committed to him all her life by not marrying any one else and keeping herself by Sudhanya's side on the war field assisting and encouraging

her lover all the while. At last Indumati felt completely overwhelmed when she saw Bhagawan Sri Krsna with her lover Sudhanya (27).

Next, the Yajna horse entered the territory of Pramila (a land of women only). There was not a single male in the country. And the land was ruled by the female ruler called Pramila. Arjun considered it both delicate and embarrassing to fight with a woman. So he prayed Sri Krsna. As a result Pramila got infatuated with Arjun and wished to marry him. On Sri Krsna's advice Arjun married Pramila in accordance with the Gandharva ritual and sent her to Hastinapur. She was accompanied by other women to Hastinapur too(28). Each woman of this Pramila kingdom was a cursed one (by Parvati) and was forbidden to meet any male companion. Arjun, being verily a Nara Narayana (God in mortal form), liberated them from their state of curse and despondency (29).

The same Pramila anecdote appears in the Bengali **Mahabharata** in a slightly different manner. As it puts it, Pramila was drawn to Arjun as he was accompanied by *Kamadev* or *Cupid*, the God of love. All those cursed women were, in their previous life, the children of king Dilip. Parvati's curse sent them down as women. When Arjun asked Pramila she gave him the entire account. She entreated the former to marry her. Arjun promised her to marry and left for Hastinapur (30).

Then the holy horse entered the Ugra province. It was a forbidden land of deadly demons surrounded by tall mountains and deep forest. There was a strange country where human beings appeared on trees like fruits which the ferocious cannibals ate. Arjun, however, could kill those demons and retrieve the horse(31). While in **Jaimini Bharata** it is mentioned that those demons were patronized by the demon-king Sadasiva ; in Bengali **Mahabharata** they had the blessing and support of both Shiva and

Parvati (Hara-Gouri). Similarly, in **Jaimini Bharata** the land of the demons is called Ugra Desha while in Bengali **Mahabharata** it is called Vrukshadesha (32). The rest, however, remains same.

According to Bengali **Mahabharata** when Babruvahana had been to the Nether world to get the *Sanjeevani*, Dhritarashtra (the minister of Naga king Ananta) refused to give him. It was because he happened to be a good friend of blind king Dhritarashtra of Hastinapur. In **Jaimini Bharata**, on the other hand, it is mentioned that in the great fire of *Khandava* all the kith and kin of Dhritarashtra (a cobra) were killed for which he wanted to take revenge on Arjun. So he refused to give the *Amritamani* or *Sanjeevani* whatsoever. Apart from this minor variation both the Bengali **Mahabharata** and the **Jaimini Bharata** are nearly identical in their approach and presentation (33).

Again, while in **Jaimini Bharata** the city of Sikhidhwaja king is mentioned as Kantavatipur, in Bengali **Mahabharata** it is named as Ratnavatipur. Further, the Brahmin(in disguise) refused to take the sacrifice from the king as tears rolled down his left eye when he gave away his right limbs. As the **Jaimini Bharata** narrates, queen Kumudavati made humble request to the Brahmin-in-disguise to accept the dana (sacrifice) ; whereas in the Bengali **Mahabharata** it is mentioned that the Brahmin-in-disguise was humbly requested to accept the half-detached head of king Sikhidhwaja as sacrifice(34). The rest of the narration remains mostly identical in theme and approach.

The entry of the yajna horse in Ratnapur and the capture of the same by Vir Varma remain same both in the Bengali **Mahabharata** and the **Jaimini Bharata** though, they only differ in the name of the Rishi concerned. While the former calls the Rishi Vakadalavya, the latter calls him Vakadanta (35).

The Bengali **Mahabharata** mentions the holy horse entering Sindhudesa which was being ruled by the son of Jayadratha and his widow Dushila (Duryodhan's sister). It further mentions the name of their son as Manibhadra. But this son's name doesn't figure in **Jaimini Bharata**. And as per the account of **Jaimini Bharata** the King Manibhadra died of shock when he heard the coming of Arjun. But in Bengali **Mahabharata** it is mentioned that king Manibhadra ran away when he heard that Arjun was approaching. The rest, however, remains same (36). Then the Yajna came to an end and the Pandavas set out on their journey to Heaven (Swargarohana).

Towards the end of 13th century, a poet called Hari Hara Bipra wrote a book entitled Babruvahana Yuddha (in the shadow of **Jaimini Bharata**) under the patronage of King Durlava Narayana in Assam. This book had six hundred couplets(37). According to this book (of poet Hari Hara) the Yajna Horse first entered the territory of Mainpur. When Babruvahana, the king of Manipur, knew from his mother that Arjun was his own father he wanted to return the horse with gifts and apology. But, ironically, Arjun had completely forgotten about his marriage with Princess Chitrangada. So he was harsh and offensive to Babruvahana and also cast aspersions on his mother's (Chitrangada's) character. Thus provoked Babruvahana, under the circumstances, was compelled to fight. And the fight was disastrous as Arjun got killed. Here lord Krsna Himself came to the spot and gave life to Arjun and reminded him that he had married princess Chitrangada in the course of his tour across Manipur. Then followed the exciting reunion of Arjun with his son Babruvahana and wife Chitrangada (38). This episode with the emotion-packed reunion of the father and son duo (Arjun and Babruvahana) is elaborately drawn in the Aswamedha parva of the Assamese **Mahabharata** (39). The Assamese version of the great Indian Epic is not a literal translation of the Sanskrit **Mahabharata**. Though the main story line and the basic structure is maintained,

there have been changes and variations now and then in the Assamese version. The original composition of poet Rama Saraswati's was later re-composed by three poets (Ganga Dasa, Subuddhi Ray and Bhabani Dasa) on a collaborative basis. They have mainly focused on the Aswamedha parva and achieved their imaginative and stylistic excellence(40).

The ancient long narrative called **Lang Goi Sagol Thaba** that exists in Manipuri literature focuses on a horse that is meant to be sacrificed in a ritual (Aswamedha). That was composed in the manner of the Bengali **Mahabharata** written by poet Gangadas Sen, especially its fourth chapter narrating the Aswamedha Yajna. In Manipuri dialect, the Aswamedha parva was composed in 1724 by Langjam Prasuram's son Langjam Chandrashyam and his disciples(41). In this Manipuri version, we find the entire focus on the fight between Arjun and Babruvahana. When son Babruvahana comes with gifts and the yajna horse to receive his father Arjun, the latter turns harsh to him and abuses him calling him the son of a harlot. Babruvahana swallows everything as a son, but such horrific aspersion on his mother (Chitrangada) brings him to his elements who challenges Arjun and beheads him at the end. Babruvahana's step-mother Ullupi, the daughter of the snake-king Ananta, had sent Pundariksha to the nether-world to fetch the life-giving GEM. While the snake-king Ananta was too willing to part with the GEM for the sake of his son-in-law (Arjun), his own minister and people were opposed to it. Incidentally, Babruvahana launched an offensive on the Nether-world and realized the GEM. But in the meantime yet another conspiracy was hatched by the minister of snake-king Ananta. He had stolen the severed head of Arjun without which the revival of life was not possible. However, the crisis was soon resolved as Bhagawan Sri Krsna arrived on the wings of Garuda over there in Manipur and the high drama ended with Arjun getting back to life and united with his son(42).

This text, however, makes a point that mother Chitrangada was quite unhappy with her son Babruvahana's impulsive decision to fight with his father Arjun without consulting her. At the happy ending and reunion of Arjun with his heroic son Babruvahana and both his loyal and committed wives (Chitrangada and Ullupi) he made a fervent request to both Chitrangada and Ullupi to spend the rest of their lives at Hastinapur.

In the Bengali **Mahabharata** there is a minor variation of the story which mentions that Bhima, Kunti, Yashoda and Devaki too had accompanied Sri Krsna to Manipur when Arjun was reported lying dead over there. The Manipuri version of the Aswamedha Parva, however, mentions about Sri Krsna going alone to Manipur on the wings of Garuda. Sarala **Mahabharata** in Oriya simply mentions Sri Krsna's act of reviving Arjun from death. In the **Jaimini Mahabharata** there are elaborate accounts of Babruvahana's offensive in the Naga Loka (Nether-world) the possession of the life-giving GEM from there and finally bringing Arjun back to life. As we see, the Aswamedha Parva of the Bengali, Manipuri and the Assamese **Mahabharata** was largely influenced by the **Jaimini Mahabharata**. In the Bengali version of the epic composed by poet Parameswar Das (under the patronage of Pargal Khan) there is a brief description of the Aswamedha Parva(43). Here we notice a perceptible influence of the Sanskrit **Mahabharata**. On the other hand, poet Srikar Nandy's Bengali version was heavily influenced by the Sanskrit **Jaimini Bharata**. Similarly, poet Kasiram Das's **Mahabharata** (the Aswamedha Parva in particular) was composed visibly in the shadow of the Sanskrit **Jaimini Bharata**(44). In the Oriya **Mahabharata** of Sarala Dasa, however, there is only a passing reference to the Aswamedha Parva. While in all other versions of the great Indian epic across the eastern and north-eastern Indian peninsula we notice a massive thrust on the Aswamedha Parva, Sarala Dasa doesn't seem to subscribe to it. This is yet another original deviation of this great genius.

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