

Block**1****HOMER: THE *ILIAD***

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COURSE INTRODCUTION

Today when we are on the threshold of venturing into an English Honours Programme, we realise that Greek and Latin literature exerted a profound influence on Western culture and Literature. **Homer, Aristotle, Sophocles, Virgil, Ovid, and Horace** might be familiar names to some of us while some of us may not have heard of them at all. This course presents an overview of classical literature from **Homer to Sophocles**, to **Plautus, Ovid and Horace** and discusses most of the ancient genres: epic, tragedy, comedy, and rhetoric. These texts have been chosen for their fame and the impact they have created in Literature today, and will be read in translation; we will also be paying attention to critical and scholarly approaches to their study.

This course offers an introduction to classical literature, as some working knowledge of it is essential for our understanding of Literature *per se*. This Course will also introduce us to the development of the various literary genres of Europe. Through discussion and analysis of various literary genres and elements, we hope to enhance our learner's awareness and appreciation of Classical European Literature.



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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block will introduce the father of Classical Literature – Homer and his famous epic the *Iliad*. As we go through the text and the units our understanding of what constituted Greek Literature, Greek poetry, the tradition of the Epic, the Homeric Hero will become clear to us and our appreciation of a world and time long gone will grow. This Block begins by looking at the *Iliad* as a story of the elopement of Helen with Paris the Prince of Troy, and ends with the description of the last few days of the war. The Trojan War as we may know is ultimately won by trickery and the use of the wooden horse. From this entry point we will go on to discussing what an epic is, what the Homeric epic looks like, the qualities of an epic hero, the Homeric hero and basically examine the critical perspectives on the Epic. The text that you are expected to read is **Homer** the *Iliad* translated by **E V Rieu** (*Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985*). Good luck with your work!



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UNIT 1 APPROACHING THE *ILIAD*, THE EPIC AND THE HOMERIC TRADITION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Story of the *Iliad*
 - 1.2.1 Approaching the *Iliad*
- 1.3 Epics in Western Literature
 - 1.3.1 Definition of an Epic
 - 1.3.2 Characteristics of an Epic
- 1.4 The Homeric Tradition: Classical Epics
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Hints to Check Your Progress
- 1.7 Glossary

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The *Iliad* is an ancient poem written in the Greek language. It was composed by the Greek poet **Homer**. Many of us do not know the Greek language nor have we knowledge of the epic tradition and Greek civilisation of those ancient days. So when we talk about the poem The *Iliad*, we say it is “all Greek to us”, - an English idiom meaning the poem is beyond our understanding. The objectives of this unit are to introduce the epic tradition, and also to make the Homeric tradition known to you. The *Iliad* was composed around the 8th century B.C. This makes the poem almost 3000 years old. We cannot talk about the epic tradition in isolation. It will be easy to learn about epic tradition, if we relate it to the epic poem. Let us start with a brief summary of the *Iliad* and infer from it some of the salient features of an epic. From there we will proceed to discuss the classical epics and the Homeric tradition.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is but natural for a proper study and analysis of the *Iliad*, the first requirement is to know the story. The *Iliad* deals with events of the final weeks of the Trojan War, a war that had lasted for ten years. If you recall, the *Mahabharata*, the ancient Indian epic, deals with eighteen days of the *Kurukshetra* war. The *Ramayana* also devotes its main story to the last year of *Rama*’s fourteen years of exile when he fights with *Ravana* to restore *Sita* from *Ravana*’s kingdom of Lanka.

In the *Iliad* the war is between the Greeks and the Trojans, triggered by the abduction of *Helen* by the Trojan prince, *Paris*. *Helen* was the wife of *Menelaus* (the brother of *Agamemnon*), the Greek commander. We can see

a parallel in the *Ramayana*, where the war between *Rama* and *Ravana* was similarly triggered by the abduction of *Sita* by the demon king. Similarly the *Mahabharata* war was between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* following a cry of revenge by *Draupadi* for the attempt at disrobing her by, the *Kauravas*. We will look at the story of the *Iliad* in brief next.

1.2 THE STORY OF THE *ILIAD*

The Trojan War was waged against the city of Troy by the *Achaeans* (Greeks) after *Paris* of Troy took *Helen* from her husband *Menelaus*, the King of *Sparta*. The war is one of the most important events in Greek mythology. Nine years after the start of the Trojan War, the Greek army captures *Chryse*, a town allied with Troy. Two beautiful Trojan maidens, *Chryseis* and *Briseis*, are taken as war booty “ one by *Agamemnon*, and the other by his deputy, *Achilles* who is the greatest among the Greek warriors. *Chryseis*’ father offers a huge ransom to *Agamemnon* for the return of his daughter, but *Agamemnon* refuses to give back the fair maiden he has won as his prize from the spoils of war. The father, *Chryses*, who serves as a priest to the god *Apollo* prays to him to punish the Greeks by sending a plague to sweep through the Greek army.

Agamemnon learns that *Chryseis* is the cause of the plague that has killed many of his soldiers and decides to return her to her father. Then he demands from *Achilles* his second -in-command, the latter’s (*Achilles*’) prize booty, *Bresias*. *Agamemnon* makes his claim for *Bresias* on the grounds that as the Commander of the Greek army, he is entitled to have her. *Achilles* is furious over *Agamemnon*’s attack on his personal honour and refuses to participate further in the war. Angry and vengeful, he prays to his mother *Thetis* to seek the help of the supreme God *Zeus* to destroy the Greeks who were already losing the battle without his (*Achilles*’) services. With *Zeus* supporting the Trojans and *Achilles* refusing to fight, the Greeks suffer great losses. When defeat becomes imminent, *Achilles* out of concern for his Greek army, asks his close friend *Patroclus* to fight the Trojans. But in the battle, *Hector*, the Trojan hero slays *Patroclus*. When *Achilles* discovers that *Hector* is the slayer of his friend, he is overwhelmed with grief and anger and he agrees to reconcile with *Agamemnon* and rejoin the battle. *Achilles*, the unrivalled Greek warrior, kills every Trojan who stands in his way and finally kills *Hector*, with the help of the goddess *Athena*. He drags *Hector*’s body tied to the back of his chariot across the battlefield to the Greek camp. Lord *Zeus* feels that *Hector* deserves a hero’s burial and sends the god *Hermes* to escort, *Hector*’s father, *Priam* to the enemy camp and plead with *Achilles* for the return of his son’s body to give him a fitting hero’s burial. *Priam* tearfully requests *Achilles* for his son’s body. This is a moving episode of a father pleading for his son’s body to be restored. *Achilles* relents and returns *Hector*’s corpse to the Trojans. Both sides agree to a temporary truce, and *Hector* receives a hero’s funeral in Troy. That in a sense is a brief summary of the *Iliad* by way of introduction. But, before we proceed further we would also need to know what a Greek Epic is or how to approach the *Iliad*.

In the next section, we shall look at how to go about beginning this Greek epic.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Attempt in your words what strikes you in this story.

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1.2.1 Approaching the *Iliad*

The story is a longish one and is made more complex because of the constant intervention of gods in human affairs. The best way to approach the *Iliad* is by reference to the two Indian epics we had earlier cited the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* depicts the battle between good and evil personified in *Rama* and *Ravana* respectively, while the *Mahabharata* details the *Kurukshetra* war between forces of good (the *Pandavas*) and forces of evil (the *Kauravas*) for the restoration of *Dharma*. It is easy to see the parallel between *Arjun-Karna* and *Achilles-Hector* as both pairs are well matched warriors of great repute. This can also be seen in the *Rama-Ravana* duel in the *Ramayana* where both are equally matched warriors. The only difference is, in the Greek poem, the Gods are in the foreground with the warriors and dictate the outcome while in the Indian epics only men fight while the Gods stay in the background and do not directly participate in it. For example, Lord *Krishna* never wielded a weapon to fight the *Kauravas*; his role was to be the mentor of the *Pandavas* and *Arjun*, in particular. Having a basis for our journey into the *Iliad* we shall now look at Epics in Western/European Literature.

1.3 EPICS IN WESTERN LITERATURE

In Western Literature, epics are composed in different genres. For example we have the:

- (a) Epic poetry of **Homer**, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, **Virgil**’s *The Aeneid*, **Spenser**’s *Faerie Queene*, **Milton**’s *Paradise Lost*, **Ezra Pound**’s *Cantos*, **Nikos Kazantzakis**’ *Odyssey*,
- (b) Epic novels of **Leo Tolstoy**, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, **Goethe**’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,
- (c) Epic plays such as **Brecht**’s *Mother Courage and her Children* and
- (d) Epic films such as **Ben Hur**, *The Ten Commandments* and *Gone with the Wind*, to name a few.

What is common in these writings that we prefix the literary genre (novel, play and poetry) with the term ‘epic.’ How do we define an epic? These are the basic questions that we should know before we read the *Iliad* both as a story and as an epic and that will be dealt with in the next section.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Can you identify a few other epics in Indian and Western literature?

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1.3.1 Definition of An Epic

All literatures have a common focus - to reveal the essential reality of life, to discover the ultimate truth and to embrace the unity of the human spirit. Whenever we speak of the classics or the classical canon, we refer to literature that stays timeless and universal. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, composed approximately between 1331BC and 827 BC, continue to have an irresistible appeal for us even today, almost after 3350 years.

The epic is one of the classical forms of writing that according to **Kline**, “*enlarges the human spirit and shows the grandeur and sublimity of life*”. Epic poems are celebrated for their exalted themes and elevated forms of expression. The grandeur of the content is matched by the grandeur of form in which it is expressed. **Sri Aurobindo** writing about the epic poem says,

...the song of the greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision, the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.
(Redfield, 1994)

All epics follow a similar pattern extolling human achievement and the essential dignity of Man even in his most trying moments, in a world that is presided over by Divinity or the Supreme Power. **C M Bowra** writing about the epic poets says:

Each had his own approach, his own solution, and his own doubts and reservations, but because all were concerned with ultimately the same issues and used the same kind of poetical form, their labours belong to a single chapter in the history of the human spirit.
(Hamner, 2008)

From all these statements given above, it can be concluded that an epic celebrates the presence of the Divine in the human spirit.

Let us look at the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* with which we are familiar to elucidate the distinctness of an epic.

- (1) Simply stated, these two are long poems. The *Ramayana* has 24,000 verses and the *Mahabharata* has verses between 8000, 24000 and 100,000 as per the three different versions given by **Vyasa**, **Vaisampayana** and **Ugracerava Sauti**.
- (2) They depict the heroic deeds of the protagonists-Lord *Ram* (the *Ramayana*) and the *Pandavas*, in particular, *Arjuna*, guided by Lord *Krishna* (the *Mahabharata*)
- (3) These two Indian epics are known as ‘*Ithihasa*’ where the word *ithihasa* splits as *iti-ha-asa* and means thus-verily-happened. Therefore, *ithihasa* or the *epic* means history as it truly happened.

From the above, we conclude that an epic poem is a long poem including history, a definition endorsed by the American poet and critic, **Ezra Pound** that depicts the heroic deeds of the protagonists.

- (4) Yet another aspect of the epic is, it is a work of art “*surpassing the dimensions of realism*” (**Mary McCarthy**). Thus, we have the dual relation of an epic to history on the one hand and to everyday reality on the other.

What then are the chief characteristics of an epic? We would need to be able to identify these characteristics as we are examining an ancient Greek epic in this block. The next section will deal with the characteristic of an epic.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Attempt in not more than 500 words, the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Hint: Delineate only the main plot.
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- 2) Attempt an appreciation of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as epic poems
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- 3) How many books (parvas) constitute the Mahabharata and how many the Ramayana?
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1.3.2 Characteristics of an Epic

It is clear from the epic stories that they deal with a lofty theme and use exalted language to deal with or describe a larger-than-life hero and his grand adventure/exploits. There are ten identifiable features of an epic, but it is not necessary that every epic has all the ten features. Broadly speaking, the following are the attributes of an epic narrative.

1. Exalted theme dealing with the heroic deeds of a great man- a king or a leader or a warrior of exceptional merit. In other words, an epic celebrates the great deeds of exceptional men. It also deals with the greatness and magnificence of the divine power. We see the interplay of the divine powers and humans in all the epics. In the two Indian epics, we have the Lord's descent to earth as '*Avatar*' to destroy evil. In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the gods intervene in human affairs that determine the fate of the humans.
2. An Epic is large in scale. The inherent quality of an epic is its expansive or large scale proportion. It was mostly written in verse in the ancient times, though in modern times epic novels and epic plays have used the prose form. Western epics are either in 12 books or multiples of 12. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* consist of 24 books each. **Virgil's** *Aeneid* is in 12 books, so is **Milton's** *Paradise Lost*. Though **Spenser** in the 17th century intended to write his epic *Faerie Queene* in 12 books, he completed only 7. But the first three books together have 12 cantos, while books 4-6 have 12 cantos each. Indian epics do not follow the western tradition of using 12 as a unit.
3. An epic presents heroic ideals such as courage, honour, sacrifice, patriotism and kindness. It also gives a clear picture of the social and cultural patterns of contemporary life.
4. Epic language consists of ornamental similes, recurrent epithets, stock phrases and an expressive style. Classical epics were originally recited and

they were oral epics and hence the use of recurrent phrases in the oral transmission of the poems as they served as mnemonic aids for both the singer and the audience alike.

5. An epic poet possesses a high degree of imaginative power, what is referred to as poetic inspiration and an equally high degree of consciousness of technique.
6. An epic is characterised by the Unity of action. **Aristotle**, the ancient Greek philosopher and scientist had prescribed three principles of dramatic construction-*Unity of action*, *Unity of time* and *Unity of place*. Unity of action means that there should be one action and sub plots should be minimal. **Homer** in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, centers his stories on a single action. In both the Homeric epics, we see every action directed or caused or influenced by God. Turn to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and you will discover that they have the Unity of action that runs through, namely the defeat of the evil and the triumph of the good towards the re-establishment of dharma.
7. An Epic generally begins with stating the theme or subject of the story. The first lines of an epic poem indicate the subject the poem will treat. For example **Milton** in his opening lines of his epic, *Paradise Lost* says his aim in writing the epic is to 'justify the ways of God to men'. The *Iliad* begins with
"Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles."
Homer announces his subject in the very first word of the very first line: "Rage". He then locates the rage within *Achilles*, 'Peleus' son and the rest of the poem delineates the consequences of that rage.
8. The statement of the theme is followed by an invocation to the Muse by the poet for divine inspiration to narrate the story. **Homer** begins his two epic poems, The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with an invocation to the Muse, seeking inspiration from a higher source.

Book I of the *Iliad* begins thus:

Goddess, sing me the anger, of Achilles, Peleus' son that fatal anger that brought countless sorrows on the Greeks, and sent many valiant souls of warriors down to Hades, leaving their bodies as spoil for dogs and carrion birds: for thus was the will of Zeus brought to fulfilment. Sing of it from the moment, when Agamemnon, Atreus' son, that king of men, parted in wrath from noble Achilles

The Iliad, Book I, Klein, 2009

Homer asks the Muse to begin the story at the time when *Agamemnon* and *Achilles* parted in wrath for the first nine years out of the ten-year conflict.

9. Epics generally begin in the middle of the story - what is known as *media res*. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* both begin in the middle, then move directly forward while the earlier events are presented as flashbacks. The *Iliad* after the invocation to the Muses continues:

Which of the gods set these two to quarrel? Apollo, the son of Leto and Zeus, angered by the king, brought an evil plague on the army, so that the men were dying, for the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses, the priest. He it was who came to the swift Achaean ships, to free his daughter, bringing a wealth of ransom, carrying a golden staff adorned with the ribbons of far-striking Apollo, and called out to the Achaeans, above all to the two leaders of armies, those sons of Atreus: 'Atreides, and all you bronze- greaved Achaeans, may the gods who live on Olympus grant you to sack Priam's city, and sail back home in safety; but take this ransom, and free my darling child; show reverence for Zeus's son, far-striking Apollo.

Kelin, 2009

Turn to the story of the *Iliad* (1.1). You will see that the poem gives in flashback the background of the quarrel between *Agamemnon* and *Achilles*;

- 10. The use and intervention of the supernatural. As stated above, epics present deeds of great valour and reflect superhuman courage especially when humans encounter supernatural forces such as gods, angels, demons who intervene in human affairs. The Greek epics are replete with the intervention of the Gods, and their interventions and cunning actions help seal the fate and decide the outcomes of the actions of humans who are under their patronage. Divine intervention is present from the very beginning in the *Iliad*.
- 11. Catalogues and genealogies are given. These long lists of objects, places, and people place the finite action of the epic within a broader, universal context. Often, the poet is also paying homage to the ancestors of audience members. Main characters give extended formal speeches.

The *Iliad* is the first marvelous expression of the Greek genius. It is described as a “*poem of force*” (**Simon Weil**) where the human spirit is subjected to the divine or Gods’ force and also to Fate’s force for, the Greeks believed in Fate or destiny. All the Greek epic heroes like *Achilles* and *Hector* in the *Iliad*, *Odysseus* in the *Odyssey* “*consider themselves a battleground of arbitrary forces and uncanny powers,*” (**Bruno Snell**). We have defined an epic and looked at the characteristics of an epic, in the next section we shall examine Classical Epics and the Homeric tradition in detail.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) How do you define an epic poem?
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- 2) What are the characteristics of an epic that are applicable to the *Iliad*.
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1.4 THE HOMERIC TRADITION: CLASSICAL EPICS

Classics are often associated with works of antiquity - in particular - in the West with literature of ancient Greece and Rome; otherwise in most of the World Literature, they relate to the most highly developed stage of an earlier civilisation and its culture. On that count, we see Indian epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* exemplify the value of responsible humanism in times both of war and peace. These epics that shape the image of Man are as **Franz Kafka** says like “*ice axe to break the sea frozen inside us*”. Almost all the books that we label as classics deal with Man’s struggle against forces of inhumanity and his attempt at restoration of a moral order after a calamitous upheaval. Hence, study of the Classics is fundamental to understanding the value of order, harmony and beauty in a strife-torn world. They exalt us to a higher plane, far away from the mundane world and help us confront greatness. These are works that have come down to us generation after generation and the past canonical genius is pivotal to satisfy our present aspiration to achieve similar heights. Classical Literature and its canonical authority are the best means available to us to help us civilise our generation.

The word ‘classic’ is more often used as an adjective than a noun to denote something exemplary, of first rank or the highest class, something of demonstrably enduring quality. What is the quality that runs through the Classics? This quality, known as classicism is marked by beauty, taste, refinement, restraint, clarity and order. *Classicism* is often regarded as the vehicle of reason and logic while its counterpart, the other celebrated genre, *Romanticism* is the vehicle of feeling and imagination, though it is difficult to straightjacket literature into water-tight compartments. The imagination of a classical writer and the rationality of a Romantic writer complement each other.

The *Classical* writer does not let out his/her own emotions and feelings, but remains objective, unclouded by personal bias and prejudice. We don’t meet **Shakespeare** in his plays nor do we get to know **Homer** from the *Iliad*. We do not get to know **Valmiki** or **Vyasa** from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. What we refer to as *Classicism* is to be seen both in form and content. It implies harmony and control and a restraining and supportive order. It helps us to apprehend noble and profound thoughts, refined and lofty feelings and higher ideals and moral values. **Professor Sidgwick** defines classical literature as “*the essence of a truly humanizing culture*”.

The great classical works of the West, starting with **Homer** and running through Greek masters like **Aeschylus**, **Sophocles**, **Euripides**, and moving on to **Shakespeare**, **Moliere**, **Goethe**, **Schiller** - to name a few - show that the inevitable defeat of Man by powers that are beyond him, should not make him a helpless victim but rouse him to courageously confront the powers. In the Greek Classics it is a choice-less choice imposed on Man where he has to fight not necessarily for a win, but for a loss. But still, this does not deter him from confronting a conflict, not always of his own making. It is in this struggle that Man gains his nobility, worth and dignity. As **Harold Bloom** says:

These classical works constitute what we call the Western Canon - that negates the distinction between knowledge and opinion ... that are time-proof but not reason-proof.

They are not meant for any social change as many of our contemporary writings do, but inherent in them are noble values that give a special stature to Man. Classical literature does not offer false security, pseudo comfort and deceptive consolation. It makes one confront Reality - not the everyday reality, not the slice of life kind - but Reality of existence. It shows the microcosmic man in eternal confrontation with the macrocosmic universe. There is no fanciful imagination to show that Man triumphs over the unseen Powers; there is no attempt to alleviate the disorderliness of life, but the focus is on a truthful representation of a courageous Man fighting even if it is a losing battle. The dignity of Man lies not in the stoic acceptance of defeat, but in his courageous affirmation of his strength to resist even when the dice is heavily loaded against him.

In the *Iliad*, we find the two great heroes subjected to God’s force and the end result is what the Gods decide. **Homer** is at his best when he depicts the strife of men and Gods. We have to locate the *Iliad* in the ancient times of Greek civilisation. Those were the days when warfare was glorified and victory was the highest ideal to strive for. **Hector** is humiliated in death, stripped of his heroic stature and dignity. But *Achilles* even in his victory cannot overcome the bitter sense of his own mortality. This is what **Shakespeare** who wrote 2000 years later refers to when he says “We are unto Gods, like flies to boys who kill us for their sport.” *Achilles*, *Hector* and *Patroclus* fight when they know that they are not the masters of their fate nor are they equal to the Gods. The sense of divine presence is in the foreground which makes *Achilles* and *Hector* perform in front of a power greater than their own. Our approach to the *Iliad* must take into account the Homeric tradition where the ideal is to fight to be the best, to take away women from the defeated enemy camp as the legitimate due of a victor, and to live as long as one possibly can through one’s own strength and power. One man’s victory will always be another man’s sorrow. *Hector*’s victory over *Patroclus* regarded as an ecstasy of power, brings great and unforgettable pain to *Achilles*. *Achilles*’ victory over *Hector* causes heart wrenching pain to *Priam*, *Hector*’s father. In **Homer**’s world, power was an ideal to secure even if that power was to be had at the expense of someone else’s pain. The finer feelings of compassion, generosity towards the enemy, nobility to acknowledge the valour of the enemy are modern world concepts that were not a part of the Homeric world. To approach the *Iliad* from today’s changed perspective without taking into account the social structure of the ancient world will result in a distortion of the Homeric values.

Check Your Progress 5

1. How is the Homeric concept of war different from our present attitude towards war?
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1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have summarised, the *Iliad* briefly. By referring to the Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* with, which we are familiar, we have tried to define an epic and delineate its features. We have followed it

up with a brief analysis of the Homeric tradition so that we read *the Iliad* alongside a parallel study of the culture and tradition of the ancient Greek civilisation.

1.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Refer to section 1.1, and 1.2

Check Your Progress 2

1. Indian Epics: *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, *Shishupal Vadha*, *Kiratarjuniya*, *ilappatikaran*, *Manikhelai*, *Ramcharitamanas*, *Kamayani*, to name a few.

Western Epics: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Aeneid*, *Metamorphoses*, *The Shahnameh*, *Beowulf*, *The Song of the Roland*, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, *Orlando Furioso*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Rape of the Lock*, *Don Juan*, to name a few.

Check Your Progress 3

2. Refer to section 1.1, 1.2, 1.3.1
3. Refer to section 1.3.1

Check Your Progress 4

1. Refer to section 1.3.1
2. Refer to section 1.3.2

Check Your Progress 5

1. Refer to section 1.4

1.7 GLOSSARY

<i>Dharma</i>	:	the essential principle of the cosmos.
<i>Canon</i>	:	a list of the works of an author that are accepted as authentic; a rule or especially body of rules or principles generally established as valid and fundamental in a field or art or philosophy
<i>Avatar</i>	:	the incarnation of the deity, Lord Vishnu in human or superhuman or animal form
<i>Simile</i>	:	a figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds (usually formed with ‘like’ or ‘as’)
<i>Epithet</i>	:	a graphic or vivid verbal description; descriptive word or phrase
<i>Mnemonic aids</i>	:	devices intended to assist the memory
<i>Invocation</i>	:	a prayer asking God’s help
<i>media res</i>	:	into the middle of things
<i>cataclysmic</i>	:	large scale and violent
<i>mundane</i>	:	dull, unexciting
<i>inexorabl</i>	:	impossible to stop; unrelenting
<i>microcosmic</i>	:	A small, representative system having analogies to a larger system
<i>macrocosmic</i>	:	The entire world, the universe.

UNIT 2 THE HOMERIC HERO

Structure

- 2:0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Achilles, the Warrior Hero
- 2.3 Hector and Achilles
- 2.4 Who is the Hero of the *Iliad*?
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Hints to Check Your Progress
- 2.7 Glossary

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall look at:

- the essential conflict between two egoistic leaders,
- the emergence of *Achilles* as the Homeric hero
- the comparisons and points of contrast between *Achilles* and *Hector* as the hero of the *Iliad*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Iliadic war started primarily because of the abduction of Queen *Helen*, the beautiful wife of the Greek King *Menelaus* of Sparta by the Trojan Prince, *Paris*. King *Menelaus* was the brother of King *Agamemnon*, King of *Mycenae*. The poem depicts only the last forty days of the war and bypasses the main cause of the conflict (*Helen's* abduction) between the Trojans and the Greeks. It also leaves out the final outcome of the war- the Trojan rout by the Greeks with the help of the famous wooden horse.

The *Iliad* in 24 books focuses on the Greek hero, *Achilles* who was responsible for the death of *Hector*, his Trojan counterpart and the rout of the Trojan army. *Achilles* had initially withdrawn from the fight in anger against his chief *Agamemnon's* decision to claim *Briseis*, the slave woman, whom he (*Achilles*) had won as his war prize. While *Agamemnon* is the leader of the Greek forces, he depends on the heroic valour of *Achilles* to win battles for him. Hence, when *Achilles* is denied his prize slave, he is upset and refuses to fight on *Agamemnon's* side. Thus, the essential conflict at the beginning of the *Iliad* is the clash of two strong egos - that of the leader, *Agamemnon* and *Achilles*. *Agamemnon* believes in his hierarchical position as leader and therefore feels justified in claiming the war booty from *Achilles* the greatest Greek warrior, though he is a subordinate soldier. *Achilles* feels insulted and humiliated, as he is far too conscious of his worth, his sense of personal glory and personal excellence- what the Greeks define as '*arete*'. Both believe in their own superiority and their own subjective notion of the pursuit of excellence and thus, ensues the conflict between them. The poem relates the heroic fight of *Achilles* that routes the Trojans and kills *Hector*, the Trojan prince. The next section will analyse *Achilles* as a warrior hero.

Check Your Progress 1

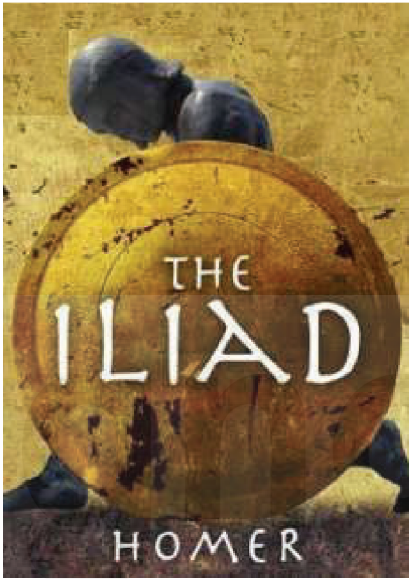
- 1) Do you see any parallel between the Mahabharata and the Iliad in the context of the clash of two strong egos - of Duryodhan and *Dharma* in the Mahabharata in the former and between Achilles and Agamemnon in the latter?

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2.2 *ACHILLES, THE WARRIOR HERO*

From the story, it is clear that *Achilles* is projected as the hero of the *Iliad*, though *Hector*, the Trojan warrior is in confrontation with him and in seeking a share of the heroic status. Both are well matched but the claim to be the Homeric hero seems to belong to *Achilles* as the entire story hinges upon *Achilles*, who after his initial refusal to fight enters the battlefield to avenge the killing of his friend *Patroclus*. *Achilles* - as a warrior, as a friend, as a valiant fighter who sets aside his pride and hurt ego for the higher cause of avenging his friend's death and finally as a magnanimous and compassionate human being in the last book (Book XXIV), when he returns *Hector's* body to *Hector's* old father to enable him to give his son a befitting hero's burial- represents all the heroic ideals of the Homeric age. The next Unit, (Unit III- War in the Homeric Age: Honour Vs Horror-) will discuss the War concept prevalent at that time.

The poem after announcing the theme (the wrath, or the anger, of *Achilles* and its effects) and invoking the Muse goes straight to the conflict between *Agamemnon* and *Achilles*. *Achilles'* pride and hurt ego initially make him stay away from the war. But more distressing, almost to the point of betrayal is his prayer to his mother, the goddess *Thetis*, to request *Zeus* to ensure a Trojan victory over his own countrymen, the Greeks. His non participation in the crucial war on a perceived slight to his ego and his treacherous scheme to take revenge on *Agamemnon* for insulting his honour, by praying for the defeat of his own countrymen are two major flaws in his character that come perilously close to

discrediting his heroic status. But, it has to be remembered that personal honour is of prime importance to a Homeric hero. While the honour of Homeric society depends on the personal valour of its heroes, personal honour as *Achilles* shows depends on one's own moral evaluation of his honour. The *Iliad* raises the question as to whether war with its use of violence and force can be morally justified in the context of preserving the honour of the society/nation or preserving one's personal honour as *Achilles* views it.

The wrath of *Achilles* seems justified from Book I to Book IX as he refuses to bow down to the whimsical and unethical demands of his leader, *Agamemnon*. In the ruling hierarchy, *Agamemnon* holds a higher status, but on the battlefield, *Achilles* has no equal. He towers over every *Achaean* and over every Trojan. The only one who is close to his fighting prowess is the Trojan prince, *Hector*. Viewing the strength, courage and power of *Achilles*, the Greeks request him to return to the battlefield to defeat the Trojans, who with *Zeus*' support (as sought by *Achilles*) were emerging triumphant against them. After much persuasion, *Achilles* relents not by personally entering the battlefield but by sending his best comrade, *Patroclus* to fight the ace Trojan warrior, *Hector*. *Hector*'s killing of *Patroclus* is the last straw for the reluctant, egoistic *Achilles* who has decided not to enter the battlefield. *Achilles* is extremely upset and grief struck when he learns about his friend's death. For the first time, we see a different *Achilles*, not the strong and indomitable *Achilles*, but *Achilles* arguing with himself over his slain friend. *Achilles*' softer side comes to the fore in this episode where he is overcome with grief on learning about *Hector*'s killing of *Patroclus*. In Book XVIII, **Homer** describes *Achilles*' sorrow:

*A black cloud of grief came shrouding over Achilles
Both hands clawing the ground for soot and filth,
he poured it over his head, fouled his handsome face
and black ashes settled on to his fresh clean war-shirt,
Overpowered in all his power, sprawled in the dust,
Achilles lay there, fallen . . .
tearing his hair, defiling it with his own hands . . .*

Achilles' grief turns into wrath as he enters the battlefield to avenge his dear friend's death. He yokes his emotion to action and rages into battle, like a flash of lightening, killing a dozen Trojans in one go. In his frenzied rage, he slaughters the Trojan enemy with merciless brutality and kills *Hector* in a single combat and attaches the corpse to his chariot, dragging it triumphantly around the walls of the city. From our modern point of view, *Achilles*' inhuman brutality deserves outright condemnation. But this happened in the Homeric age and war brutality was accepted as a part of the victor's right over the vanquished. *Achilles*' wrath is held up for criticism from Book IX to Book XVIII. And finally there is reconciliation in Book XXIV when *Achilles* and *Priam*, *Hector*'s father meet in a scene that is tender, caring and humane in contrast to the brutal, cruel and inhuman episodes of the earlier books.

When *Hector* is felled, it is the turn of the Trojans - and in particular the aged father, *Priam* to feel the heartache similar to what *Achilles* has felt over the loss of *Patroclus*. Book 24 is unique as it deals with happenings off the battle field. While *Achilles* is shown as a relentless and merciless warrior on the battle field, rejecting the opponents' repeated pleas to be spared, *Priam*'s supplication to *Achilles* to restore his son's body exemplifies the values of humility and fellow feeling.

Priam, in his paternal desire to give his son a heroic farewell, abjectly degrades himself from his kingly status to that of a suppliant. This is the necessary price he has to pay for the recovery of his son's body, regarded as the supremely valuable 'social artifact'. *Priam*'s humble supplication, his gesture of taking and kissing his son's slayer's hands is an example of a new kind of heroism - an exhibition of egoless humility in defeat. This is heroism off the battle field - recognition of the might and power of his opponent and a willing shedding of his ego in the larger context of honouring his son who has met with a heroic end. It is *Priam*, the King, who kneels before *Achilles*, the warrior. *Achilles* sees the image of his own father in *Priam*. The two feel and experience grief over human loss and in that shared pain, they come together. *Achilles* takes *Priam*'s arm and honours him by inviting him to share a meal with him. *Achilles* and *Priam* recognise their essential human identity with, each other - and with all other men. It is here the power of force meets the power of humanity. The two men - the old King and the young warrior who are sworn enemies become friends, "when they become aware of their common loss as a result of the *Iliadic* war." *Achilles* is no doubt a great Homeric hero, but his claim to that status is challenged by *Hector*, the Trojan hero whom he kills. In the next section we shall look a little more closely at the two great warriors *Hector* and *Achilles*.

2.3 HECTOR AND ACHILLES

The two great warriors, *Hector* and *Achilles*, the former a Trojan and the latter a Greek, are both heroes of their respective nations. In the initial stages of the story, it is *Hector* who is triumphant though, his victorious onslaught over the Greeks takes place when the Greeks are without the services of their best warrior, *Achilles*. This, in no way mitigates the heroism and valour of *Hector*.

Hector is committed to his country. Though outraged at *Paris*' (his brother's) action of abducting *Helen*, *Hector* agrees to fight the Greeks who in their vengeful fury were overrunning his country. Knowing the Greeks to be formidable he has to be the one potent force to defeat them. *Hector* fulfills his role as the defender of Troy. *Hector* is a good example of a hero whose great feats on the battlefield are a measure of his loyalty to his society though he personally and morally disapproves of *Paris*' elopement with *Helen* that has triggered the war. He shows character by his willingness to enter the battlefield though he recognises the inevitability of defeat and the subsequent suffering that will befall his wife and his son.

Unlike *Achilles*, *Hector* has a family and has great devotion and love for his wife and son. The *Iliad* has a tender scene early in Book VI when *Hector*'s wife *Andromache* and his son *Astynax* plead with him not to be on the vanguard and plunge headlong into war. *Andromache* anticipates her own fate in case *Hector* gets killed as she has already lost her entire family of father and seven brothers who were victims to the wrath of *Achilles*. She cries out to *Hector*:

*You, Hector – you are my father now, my noble mother;
a brother too, and you are my husband, young and warm and strong!
Pity me please.*

Hector foresees the terrible horror his wife and son will undergo in case of his defeat.

*That is nothing, nothing beside your agony
when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears.
wrenching away your day of light and freedom!
Then far off in the land of Argos you must live.
labouring at a loom, at another woman's beck and call,
fetching water at some spring, Messeis or Hyperia,
resisting all the way –*

But still *Hector* will not be deterred; he decides to fight and prior to that, he prays and wishes that one day his son will be the prince of the Trojans, their best fighter, better even than his father, “a joy to his mother's heart”. *Hector* is seen as a family man with deep love for his wife and child. Compare him with *Achilles*, who also has his softer side towards his mother and his friend *Patroclus*. This brings us to an important – who is the real hero of the *Iliad*? We shall try and examine that next.

2.4 WHO IS THE HERO OF THE *ILIAD*?

This is a central question of the *Iliad* as to who lays claim to the status of a hero - *Achilles* or *Hector*? Both have their unique place in their respective kingdoms. But in their attitude towards war, in their display of loyalty to their masters, in their strong bonding with their families, one detects a fairly large degree of unlikeness.

Even when *Hector* is furious about his brother, *Paris*' abduction of *Helen*, he casts aside his anger and enters the battlefield to save the Trojans from the onslaught of the Greeks. *Hector* shows that he can control and overcome his honest feelings about the wrongdoing of his brother, in the larger interest of saving the honour of his countrymen. In contrast, *Achilles* is full of vengeful anger, initially against *Agamemnon* and later against *Hector* for killing his friend *Patroclus*. Rage characterises every action of *Achilles*. Thus, *Hector* emerges as a civilised hero while *Achilles* seems to be a personification of primitive brutality, pride, vindictiveness and wrath.

For *Hector*, war is a necessary evil and he is aware of his defeat at the end. But being forced into the war, he has no option but to fight valiantly and bravely. *Achilles*, on the other hand lives and swears by war and violence as he sees in it the means to preserve his dignity and pride and earn personal and everlasting glory. *Hector*'s approach is altruistic and humanistic. *Achilles*' is self-centred and savagely inhuman. *Hector*'s loyalty is towards his people; *Achilles*' loyalty is towards his friend. In fact, it is said that *Hector* is nobly and selflessly heroic. The loyalty, integrity and love that *Hector* displays gives him an edge over *Achilles* to be the hero of the *Iliad*. But it is here one has to judge not by the humanistic values of our times but by the values of the Homeric world where to fight and win glory was the highest goal of a warrior.

Let us see what the heroic attributes of those days were. According to **Cole D Lemme**, they were among other things,

- Honour;
- Respect for the Dead
- Battle and Bravery;
- Devotion to king or the leader and lastly, and more importantly
- Opinions concerning eternal glory and a short life *versus* no eternal glory and a long happy life.

Achilles, the unrivalled Homeric hero exemplifies the first while *Hector* the brave man with great love and concern for his family is for a moment confounded by the latter.

Let us discuss the above mentioned heroic attributes of the Homeric world:

- Honour is a heroic ideal, all-embracing, broad and comprehensive. It refers to one's reputation, glory, upright character, integrity, dignity and pride. It is not that all great heroes of **Homer** have all these distinctive attributes, but they adhere to the basic and the essential aspects of the concept of honor. *Hector* shows uprightness of character when he decides to fight a war that is provoked by an unethical act committed by his brother. He is a man, devoted to his family, a caring husband, a proud father, a trustworthy son, a loyal citizen and an honorable soldier. *Hector* is more a man who loves a peaceful family life with his wife and son. His unflinching loyalty and devotion to his king and his country, not rage or revenge, makes him fight unto death. The only reason *Hector* does not leave the army and live a long life with his wife is because he cannot face the disgrace of leaving *Priam* and the army in their hour of need and, being labelled a coward. *Hector* says:

*All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.
But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy
And the Trojan women trailing their long robes
If I would shrink from battle now, a coward.*

The only reason *Hector* does not give up fighting even when he knows the odds are stacked against him is because he cannot take the disgrace of being called a coward. He tells his wife, that he will actually die of shame, and this thought of everyone remembering him as a coward is even more distressing than the pleasure of a peaceful life in the company of his wife and son.

Achilles, however, is quite unconcerned about obeying the king's orders and only fights for his own reasons. Only when *Achilles* decideds to come to Troy to garner eternal glory does he come; only when he learns about *Hector* killing *Patroclus*, he enters the battlefield. He fights of his own volition without any regard or loyalty to king *Agamemnon* or any other king. *Achilles* shows his pride when he refuses to fight for *Agamemnon* and that leaves a question mark on his loyalty to his country. But his rage, reputation, dignity and pride are some of the key aspects in keeping with the Homeric ideals of honour. *Achilles'* rage is a huge part of his temperament. In fact, from the beginning of the story we see that *Achilles'* rage is prominent:

*Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses
hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls,
great fighter's souls, but made their bodies carrion
feasts for the dogs and birds
and the will of Zeus was moving towards its end.*

- Respect for the dead is a major theme in this poem. One of the ways to show this respect, or lack of it is evident in the confrontation between *Achilles* and *Hector* before they fight to death. *Achilles* is always a man driven by his rage. Before the battle between *Hector* and *Achilles* begins, *Hector* is in a more reasonable state of mind while *Achilles* is enraged and out of his mind due to the death of *Patroclus*, slain by *Hector*. When *Hector* suggests that whoever wins the battle should allow the loser's family and friends to take back the body to give the dead warrior a hero's farewell, *Achilles* refuses and replies:

...don't talk to me of pacts.

There are no binding oaths between men and lions -
Wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds -
They are all bent on hating each other to the death.
So with you and me. No love between us. No truce
till one or the other falls and gluts with blood.

Hector wants to respect the dead, while *Achilles* has no respect for the dead. He is blind with anger over the death of *Patroclus*. Not only does *Achilles* refuse to make a pact with *Hector* on honouring the dead, but he shows utter contempt and disrespect to a fellow being of an equal stature. Unmindful of the nobility of *Hector* he goes on to demonstrate his disrespect for the dead, killing *Hector* and dragging his body, tied to his chariot into the Greek camp. Though in the end, he returns the body to *Priam* it is not because he shares *Hector's* nobility to respect the dead, but because he feels empathic towards *Priam*, the father of a brave young man whom he has killed and who resembles his own father. He experiences vicarious grief, imagines how his father would have felt had their roles been reversed, with he being the victim and *Hector* the victor. He visualises the scene when his father, *Peleus* would have been forced to plead with *Priam* had his son (*Achilles*) been killed.

- Battle and acts of bravery constitute the major part of this poem. The Homeric world applauds bravery in battle. *Hector* initially displays hesitation and nervousness at the sight of *Achilles* raging with fury and runs around the city walls to avoid confronting *Achilles*. Only when *Athena* takes the shape of *Deiphobus* and assures *Hector*, does *Hector* regain his courage. But even when he does muster the courage to face *Achilles*, he begins to tremble at the sight of *Achilles* in rage. *Hector* does not get the haloed glory of a victor because he displays a disturbing fear of the power of *Achilles*. It is this nervous apprehension of *Achilles'* might that dents *Hector's* courage and dignity as against *Achilles* who has courage in abundance. Though *Hector* fights valiantly till the end, his glory is muted because of his initial fear of *Achilles*.
- *Hector* fights for the glory of his country while *Achilles* fights for his own glory and for his slain friend, *Patroclus*. *Hector* thus, shows more devotion than *Achilles* as he fights for his country and also for his king. He shows true dedication and honors his father by fighting at the head of *Priam's* army regardless of the fact that he may die leaving his own son fatherless and his wife a widow. *Achilles*, however, is quite unconcerned. Only when *Achilles* decides he wants to come to Troy for eternal glory does he enter the battlefield. He has no regard for and loyalty to king *Agamemnon* or any other king.

Devotion to the King is in true measure *Hector's* greatest attribute. His entry into the battlefield is not an approval of the treacherous act of his brother *Paris* eloping with *Helen*, the wife of the Greek king, though the moral implication in *Hector's* decision to fight becomes a covert sanction of *Paris'* heinous act. But this has to be weighed against his commitment to his countrymen who were pushed into the fight by the lust of their prince, *Paris*. *Hector's* loyalty to his father, King *Priam* makes him plunge into war which he knows will be a fight for a certain defeat and not for an

ultimate win. *Achilles* has no such loyalty to his King *Agamemnon* as his pride and ego are far more important than fidelity and faithfulness. As stated earlier he enters the fray only for his personal glory and to avenge his friend's death and not because of a sense of loyalty to his king.

- The last aspect of a Homeric Hero's characteristics is seen in the contrast between *Hector* and *Achilles*. Opinions over eternal glory and a long life without that glory are varied. *Hector*, wishes to be with his wife and not in the battlefield. But he has to fight because of the shame and disgrace that would accrue on him if he stays back. *Achilles*, on the other end of the spectrum, cannot decide what he wants to do. He wishes for eternal glory, though his mother, Goddess *Thetis*, has predicted his fate that he will die if he seeks glory through the Trojan War. She prophecies, on the other hand that he can live a long life, with a wife and children who will love him, but no one will remember his name. The choice is his. *Achilles* laments his choice when he says:

*Two fates bear me on to the day of death.
If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy
My journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
My pride, my glory dies...
True, but the life that's left me will be long,
The stroke of death will not come on me quickly.*

His choice is a difficult one concerning that of eternal glory through dying in the war, or living a long and happy life with a family who will be the only ones to remember him. *Achilles* has a much more difficult time than *Hector* to decide which one he should choose. For him his pride and ego stand in the way of entering the battle fray. But he is forced enter the war as the Greeks stare at defeat in the hands of the Trojans. He also loses his friend *Patroclus* and thus, to avenge his death is pushed into the battlefield against his decision not to fight. He wins glory and immortal fame which would not have been there had he stayed back from the war. Both *Hector* and *Achilles* are aware that cowardice will give them a long life but one that is equally dishonourable. *Hector* accepts this fact more readily than *Achilles*.

In the final analysis the question who is the hero of the *Iliad* is debatable. We have seen the attributes of a Homeric hero. For the Homeric warriors, honour is the main ambition in life as well as in the afterlife. Honour comes to those who display courage, strength, skill, determination, and self esteem with no fear of confronting death. In addition to these the heroic codes include loyalty, self sacrifice, generosity, and hospitality.

From a reading of the poem, who would you consider to be the real hero in the *Iliad*? *Achilles*, and *Hector*, are the most sharply contrasted characters and both are leaders of their people. *Hector* seems to lead with more maturity because his decision to fight is not out of rage, but out of compassion for his fellow Trojans. *Achilles* on the other hand is petulant, angry, and does not display the maturity that one sees in *Hector*. Both are respected by their men, but while *Hector*'s leadership is inspirational, *Achilles* leadership instills fear in his men as well as in his enemies.

Hector comes across as a just man, god fearing and has more respect for the divine powers. For example, when his mother on his return from the battlefield asks him to offer wine to Lord *Zeus*, he says:

*I'd be ashamed to pour a glistening cup to Zeus with unwashed hands.
I'm spattered with blood and filth- how could I pray to the lord of
storm and lightning?*
(BK VI)

Achilles has no fear of the Gods nor has he respect for them. Achilles appeals to the gods only when he needs something like asking his mother goddess *Thetis* to avenge *Agamemnon*'s wrongdoings. *Achilles* challenges the gods and angers them. Perhaps this is because he resents the gods for being immortal- after all, he is a man:

... doomed to the shortest life on earth. (BK I)

Achilles is arrogant and though well aided by gods, he never utters a word of gratitude. *Hector* remains loyal to the gods up to his death, even though, essentially, they desert him.

As leaders of their armies, *Achilles* knows that he alone can bring victory to the Greeks. *Hector* is "*the lone defense of Troy*"; he has every Trojan depending on him. The way they handle their responsibilities reveals a lot about their moral character and maturity level. *Achilles*' anger against *Agamemnon* makes him remain selfishly deaf to the cries of the soldiers and the pleas of his comrades. *Hector*, too, knows that his death is a possibility, yet his loyalty and sense of duty do not allow him to stay home. An indicator of *Hector*'s selflessness is that he is fighting for his brother in a war that his brother began! At times, one reflects on the injustice of it all, yet *Hector* doesn't seem to complain. *Helen* says,

*You are the one hit hardest by the fighting, Hector, you more than
all - and all for me, whore that I am, and this blind mad Paris.*
(BK VI)

In the poem, despite the hardships and carnage in the battlefield, *Hector* remains gentle, soft and tender towards his wife and son. He smiles and laughs, speaks lovingly to his wife and admires his infant son. The "*softer*" side of *Hector* is in contrast to the hard and raging *Achilles* who had greater appeal to the Homeric audience. After all, a "*real man*" or "*real hero*" would never leave the battlefield just to see his family! However, when reading the book in modern times, *Hector* comes across as the more valiant, well-rounded and noble of the two men.

Hector hails from the Trojan civilisation that is by and large peaceful. "*Unlike Achilles, he is clearly a man made for peace, for those relationships between man and man, and man and woman, which demand sympathy, persuasion, kindness, and, where firmness is necessary, a firmness expressed in forms of law and resting on granted authority. He is a man who appears most himself in relationships with others*" as **Fagles**, puts it in *The Iliad* in Translation. *Hector*'s character is one of consistency as a man of peace and kindness, unlike *Achilles* who displays inconsistency, driven by his rage at different times. *Achilles* belongs to more violent culture and does not possess "people skills" or the rationality of *Hector*. He acts on impulse, violence is his native element. He is inconsistent and contradicts himself.

Achilles often behaves like an animal, as evidenced by his treatment of *Hector*'s body once he kills him. *Hector* also initially fights for the body of *Patroclus*, but then returns it out of respect. *Hector*, balances his warrior nature with

compassion while *Achilles*’ frenzy as a warrior has no place for the gentler emotions. The ‘soft’ side of *Achilles* flashes for a short time towards the end while *Hector* hails from a civilisation that was more humane than that of the Greeks while both believed in bravery and heroism in keeping with the ideals of the Age.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Do you agree that Hector and Achilles both have claims for being the protagonist of the epic? Give a reasoned answer.
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2. Give a character sketch of Hector.
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3. Write about the warrior hero in Achilles.
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4. Who deserves to be the hero of the *Iliad*? Give a reasoned answer.
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2.5 LET US SUM UP

We have learnt that the story of the *Iliad* basically hinges on *Achilles*, his rage and his heroism. We have shown how

- *Achilles* is as great a hero in his own right as *Hector* his opponent
- We have compared and contrasted the two warriors *Hector* and *Achilles*
- We have analysed their strengths and weaknesses to help us identify who possibly can claim the status of the hero of the epic.

2.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Think about what you know about Duryodhana and after a reading of the *Iliad*, form an opinion about Achilles and Agamemnon and write your answer.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read section 2.2
2. Read section 2.3
3. Read section 2.2 & 2.3
4. Read section 2.3 & 2.4

2.7 GLOSSARY

<i>Arête</i>	: Excellence of any kind; the act of living up to one’s potential
<i>Achaean</i>	: A Greek, especially of the Mycenaean era.
<i>Suppliant</i>	: A person who asks humbly and earnestly
<i>Argive</i>	: Related to Achaean, belonging to Greece

UNIT 3 WAR IN THE HOMERIC

AGE: HONOUR *VERSUS*

HORROR

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Different Facets of War
- 3.3 Honour *versus* Horror, the *Iliad* and the Sequels to the *Iliad*
- 3.4 Reconciliation
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Hints to Check Your Progress
- 3.7 Glossary

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, in the context of the ancient Homeric world,

- we will look at war in ancient times and how it differs from war of the present times;
- we will discuss the different facets of war that bestow honour on the heroes and also bring unmitigated suffering and pain to a large number of men and women belonging to the armies both of the victor and the vanquished.
- finally in the context of the *Iliad* and its sequels we study the ancient glorification of war and the logical consequences of the sufferings it causes.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the world is the history of violence and war, and the Iliad remains the original benchmark for our understanding of war's human dimensions.

Jose Rosenthal

The *Iliad* has generated two responses that are antithetical in nature

- (1) an admiration for force that culminates in victory for one of the warring groups. In this context, force is seen as an index of power, strength, courage and merciless brutality
- (2) an abhorrence for war that devastates both the victor and the vanquished.

Simon Weil in her essay on the Greek classic, the *Iliad*, published in 1940, holds that “*the true hero, the true -subject at the centre of The Iliad is force*”, which she defines as “*that X that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing*”. **Joel Rosenthal**, president of Carnegie Council for Ethics in International affairs comments: “*The poem invites us to reflect on the nature of war itself, and the use of force as it shapes our understanding of virtues such as honor and responsibility and vices such as excessive pride, vengeance and cruelty.*”

From these two comments arise the basic question:

- (1) who is the hero of the *Iliad*?
- (2) Is it *Achilles* or *Hector*?

- (3) or the sparring gods who are the determiners of human destiny?
- (4) or the force that has the power to celebrate virtues such as honour and responsibility, commitment and loyalty to one's group?
- (5) or the force that has the power to destroy those driven by anger, revenge and savagery?

The famous quote by **Longfellow**, “*whom the gods would destroy, they first make them mad*” is applicable to the gods in the *Iliad* where they settle their rivalry by using men to fight, filling them with vengeful and fanatic fury and cruelty.

The poem is about war. War is not new for us in modern times as we witness it happening even today, though with less openness and with more stealth and deviousness than was fought in the days of the *Iliad*. The last century (the 20th century), has seen two world wars and this century continues the war thirst albeit, witnessing more of the cloak and dagger kind where people carry guns under the cloak of fundamentalism, casteism, racism and cause untold misery to innocent people. It is no longer the one-to-one combat between two well matched heroes but is an impersonal war fought by cunning. There is no personal heroism left today as seen in the epic wars of the ancient times. The *Iliad* deals with all the facets of war “ that includes heroic deeds, catastrophic results post “ war when women of the defeated army were taken as slaves and their young sons killed lest they should grow up and rise in revenge “ all of which in the ultimate analysis, lead to the futility and pointlessness of the conflicts, causing destruction of peace all over. Once more returning to **Simon Weil**'s essay on the *Iliad*, the question she flags

Is force inevitably all-controlling and malevolent? Or can it be tamed? Is it possible to learn not to admire force, not to hate the enemy...?

Is the question that continues to trouble us. We shall examine the different facets of war in the next section.

3.2 DIFFERENT FACETS OF WAR

In the last Unit, we learnt how the poem details the war between the Trojans and the Greeks over the abduction of *Helen* by the Trojan prince *Paris*, the fights between *Agamemnon* and *Achilles* over sharing the war booty, between the Trojan *Hector* and the Greek *Patroclus*, and finally between the two incomparable heroes on either side “ *Achilles* and *Hector*. In all these quarrels, the gods and the goddesses take sides. The prelude to the war is the rivalry between three goddesses. *Paris*, the handsome Trojan prince, who is vain about his looks is asked to select the fairest among the three goddesses, *Aphrodite* (goddess of love and beauty), *Athena* (goddess of wisdom and warfare) and *Hera* (goddess of marriage, though she is cunning and manipulative). The initiation of strife, in the form of *Eris* who throws a golden apple to be given to the fairest of the three, introduces an idea that runs throughout the *Iliad*. Strife among the goddesses provokes the war. Strife causes *Achilles* to withdraw from battle. Strife between various groups and individuals sharpens the action of the poem. Finally, the resolution of strife provides an ending for the poem.

The *Iliad* as stated above deals with all the aspects of war

- heroic deeds and winning honours,
- experiencing suffering and pain,
- the clash of egos,

- the tragic losses experienced singly and collectively that include the loss of one's close friend and a father's loss of his son,
- catastrophic results post-war when women of the defeated army were taken as slaves and their young sons killed lest they should grow up and rise in revenge,
- the futility and pointlessness of the conflicts and
- the total loss of a peaceful world.

The poem depicts only the last forty days of the war and bypasses the main cause of the conflict (*Helen's* abduction) between the Trojans and the Greeks. It also leaves out the final outcome of the war "the Trojan rout by the Greeks with the help of the famous wooden horse. The *Iliad* in 24 books focuses on the Greek hero, *Achilles* who was responsible for the death of *Hector*, his Trojan counterpart and the rout of the Trojan army. He had initially withdrawn from the fight in anger against his chief *Agamemnon's* decision to claim *Briseis*, the slave woman, whom he had won as his war prize. The essential conflict at the beginning of the *Iliad* is the clash of two strong egos-that of the leader, *Agamemnon*, who believes in his hierarchal rights as the leader and that of the great warrior, *Achilles*, who feels insulted and humiliated to be denied the rightful claim to his war prize.

The war goes on even as *Achilles* is nursing his ego and grievance. The gory details of the war where the contending soldiers behave like brutal beasts, savagely tearing the entrails of their opponents, show **Homer's** matter-of-fact description and his acceptance of barbarity inherent in war. The fourteenth book of the *Iliad* dealing with *Patroclus's* vicious and barbaric killing of the Trojan warrior *Thetor* and a number of other Trojan fighters seems to endorse war brutality as a routine affair. **Homer** does not pass judgment on the ferocity of war nor looks at the force and violence employed as dehumanised acts of frenzied armies. It seems to imply that if there is war, brutality is to be accepted as a co-concurrent happening. This is not a justification but an acceptance of the inevitable concomitant of war. In a strange way, war brings men together making them violent and willing victims to violence. We may be aghast at reading the graphic details that show the irrational and an even animal like ferocity of men in war, but the Homeric picture continues to unfold before our eyes today when we learn about the beheading of captives by the Islamic State and the decapitation of soldiers on the enemy side along the Line of Control between India and Pakistan. In 1945, about seven decades ago, Hiroshima and Nagasaki witnessed a replay of war tragedy where more than two and a half million people died, a majority of them instantly, others from radiation induced cancer and leukemia, a few years later. Today leaders-political and military-cloak their ambition under the garb of nationalism and patriotism, not realising that hatred begets hatred and the brunt of war is borne by soldiers who lay down their lives. In the essay, '*On the Pleasure of Hating*', the 19th Century English essayist **William Hazlitt** describes the effects of hatred:

It makes patriotism an excuse for carrying fire, pestilence, and famine into other lands; it leaves to virtue nothing but the spirit of censoriousness.

Bernard Knox sums up **Homer's** realism this way:

*Three thousand years have not changed the human condition in this respect. We are still lovers and victims of the will to violence, and so long as we are, **Homer** will be read as its truest interpreter.*

Let us analyse the notion of honour and the concept of horror in the *Iliad* next.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) It will be an interesting activity to analyse some of the current TV serials that magnify the greatness of war through a graphic and violent presentation of war scenes.
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- 2) What are the different facets of War?
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3.3 HONOUR *VERSUS* HORROR, THE *ILIAD* AND THE SEQUELS TO THE *ILIAD*

War unites people; it is the force that absorbs and destroys men and women in its manifest violence. **Homer** does not praise war nor does he condemn it. He looks at war as a recurrent evil that cannot be wished away as it elevates the victor and eliminates the vanquished. Who the victor will be and who the vanquished cannot be decided except through war. **Homer** is stubbornly silent on the issue of the worth of war though the poem raises the question of honour *versus* horror in the battlefield. Homeric culture lays great emphasis on personal honour where the preservation of that honour is possible only through fighting, irrespective of whether one wins or loses. The warrior gains heroic nobility not only in victory but also in death. *Hector* is a good example of a hero whose great feats on the battlefield reflect a measure of his loyalty to his king and his people because he fights despite personally disapproving *Paris*’ elopement with *Helen* that triggers the war. He shows character by his willingness to enter the battlefield though he recognises the possibility of defeat and the subsequent suffering that would befall his wife and his son. The *Iliad* has a tender scene early in book six when *Hector*’s wife *Andromache* and his son *Astynax* plead with him not to be on the vanguard and plunge headlong into war.

But *Hector* will not be deterred; he decides to fight; he prays and wishes that one day his son will be the prince of the Trojans, their best fighter, better even than his father, “a joy to his mother’s heart”. *Hector*’s prayers were in vain as *Astynax* is thrown off a cliff and killed by the Greeks.

The later three Greek plays, *Agamemnon* by **Aeschylus** and *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* by **Euripides** present the aftermath of the Greek victory when women of Troy were shipped to Greece as slaves and *Astynax* brutally killed despite the heart rending pleas of *Hecuba*, his grand- mother, the widow of *Priam*. *Hecuba* in **Euripides**’ play of the same title after being captured cries:

Woe, woe is me! What words can I utter? What sorrow, what lamentation, the wretchedness of wretched old age, and slavery that I cannot bear or endure!

Woe is me! Who will defend me? What family, and what city? Aged Priam is gone; gone are my children. Which way am I to go, this or that? Where can I be safe? Where is any god or power divine to help me?
Hecuba 154-165

This is the outcome of the defeat of the Trojans, movingly portrayed by **Euripides** in *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*. *Andromache* becomes a slave along with *Hector's* mother after she is subjected to the horror of seeing *Astynax* thrown down from the ramparts of Troy. We see a parallel in *The Massacre of the Innocents*, the biblical account of infanticide, depicting the execution of all young male Jewish children by **Herod** the Great, the Roman-appointed King of the Jews for fear of one of them dethroning him and becoming the King of the Jews. We have a similar parallel in the Indian mythological story of *Kansa*, the tyrant ruler of *Mathura*, who goes on a killing spree of his sister's sons one after the other (except *Krishna* who escapes) on learning that he will be killed by the eighth son of his sister. Such inhuman cruelty continues today albeit with change of characters and change of arms and weapons. The *Iliad* presents both the euphoric and tragic results of war and has a lesson for us in the 21st Century to refrain from acts of brutality and inhumanity, cloaked under the guise of patriotism or nationalism or religious fundamentalism.

Achilles refuses to oblige the repeated requests of *Agamemnon*, *Menelaus* and *Odysseus* to enter the fray, not only on account of hurt ego and anger, but also because he sees the pointlessness of the conflict involving the two armies especially when the Trojans have neither hurt him personally nor damaged his crops nor stolen his cattle and horses. In a subtle way, **Homer** shows how war disturbs the peacetime occupation of men and women who live far removed from the battle scene. The war is fought for restoring *Helen* to *Menelaus* and for punishing the Trojans for the indiscreet act of their Prince *Paris* but it is a heavy price to pay for all those who are not a part of the war. Man's brutality, shaped by his own arrogance and tyrannical ambition, has been the subject of many of the classical masterpieces from myths to epics. More than five thousand years later it continues as witnessed in the massacre of a million soldiers during World War I and later during World War II.

After much persuasion, *Achilles* finally relents and sends his best comrade, *Patroclus* to fight the ace Trojan warrior, *Hector*. *Hector's* killing of *Patroclus* is the last straw for the reluctant *Achilles* who now needs to enter the battlefield. He is beside himself with grief and in a frenzied rage, kills *Hector* in a single combat and attaches the corpse to his chariot, dragging it triumphantly around the walls of the city. Compare this with what happened in 2010, as recorded by **Charlotte Higgins** about US troops in Iraq in 2004, when a repeat of *Achilles'* brutality occurred with the bodies of Americans attached to the backs of cars and dragged through the streets of Fallujah. What happened in the *Iliad* was well within the societal norms of the day when war showed both heroism and animalism. But such a happening in the 21st century when Man supposedly has moved far away into a more liberal, civilised and highly developed and rational society, shows that humanity is still a long way off from evolving into a more humane, enlightened and tolerant society.

Having said that, let's go back to our story. We realise that post war or during the war, heroes are bound to be martyred and in the *Trojan War*, *Priam* begs *Achilles* for *Hector's* body. This aspect of the *Trojan War* in the *Iliad* will be examined next.

Check Your Progress 2

1. How does War bring about honour as well as horror?
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3.4 RECONCILIATION

At the end of the poem *Hector's* frail and elderly father, *Priam*, enters the Greek camp and persuades *Achilles* to restore to him his son's body. In an article "On the Iliadic War", *Maronitis* writes:

Yet the Iliad still has much to say about war, even as it is fought today. It tells us that war is both the bringer of renown to its young fighters and the destroyer of their lives. It tells us about post-conflict destruction and chaos; about war as the great reverser of fortunes. It tells us about the age-old dilemmas of fighters compelled to serve under incompetent superiors. It tells us about war as an attempt to protect and preserve a treasured way of life. It tells us, too, about the profound gulf between civilian existence and life on the front line; about atrocities and indiscriminate slaughter; about war's peculiar mercilessness to women and children; about friendships and sympathies across the battle lines. It tells us of the love between soldiers who fight together. Most of all, it tells us about the frightful losses of war: of a soldier losing his closest companion, of a - father losing his son.

The *Iliad* was written in the mid " 8th Century B.C about the Trojan War that belonged to the Aegean Bronze Age around 3200 B.C. If one looks at World Literature, it will be seen that the *Mahabharata* War ended nearly a hundred years earlier in 3102 B.C. Today after 5000+ years, the repetition of bloody conflicts resulting in huge loss of men and women, civilians and soldiers underscores the truth that Man has not mentally evolved sufficiently to curb his basic animal instinct fuelled by ego, arrogance, revenge, greed and inhuman animosity for others whose racial, spatial and religious identity is different.

The *Iliadic* war first shows warriors on either side becoming indistinguishable as they are by turns victors and victims of frenzied fighting. The poignancy hits us when we realise that a life lost is a finality. A life lost is a life lost; it cannot be got back; no amount of tears can wash away the sadness of the tragedy. A Greek or a Trojan, or in today's context, an Indian or a Pakistani, a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu, they become alike and indistinguishable in death as their blood mingles and flows in streams. A life lost is one human being lost and cannot be re-got.

After the warriors' fight unto the last, the poem describes the one to one fight-the single combat-between individual heroes and at the final tally it is discovered that the number of Achaeans dead were the same as the number of Trojans. It is impossible to distinguish the two sides. It is unthinkable that they should be divided into victors and vanquished. This is best exemplified by the two important killings towards the close- the killing of *Patroclus* by *Hector* and the slaying of *Hector* by *Achilles*. **Homer** describes *Achilles* when he learns about *Patroclus'* death in book 18,

*A black cloud of grief came shrouding over Achilles
Both hands clawing the ground for soot and filth,
he poured it over his head, fouled his handsome face
and black ashes settled on to his fresh clean war-shirt,
Overpowered in all his power, sprawled in the dust,
Achilles lay there, fallen . . .
tearing his hair, defiling it with his own hands . . .”*

Achilles's grief is turned into wrath and he decides to enter the battlefield to avenge his dear friend's death. He yokes his emotion to action and rages into battle like a flash of lightning, killing a dozen Trojans in one go. When a young Trojan, Lycaon pleads with him to spare his life, Achilles speaks in a matter-of-fact tone:

*“Come, friend, you too must die. Why moan about it so?
Even Patroclus died, a far, far better man than you.
And look, you see how handsome and powerful I am?
The son of a great man, the mother who gave me life
a deathless goddess. But even for me, I tell you,
death and the strong force of fate are waiting.
There will come a dawn or a sunset or high noon
when a man will take my life in battle too –
flinging a spear perhaps
or whipping a deadly arrow off his bow.*

These lines are a summation of the ultimate truth which shows that man's equation with fate is like that of ‘a fly unto wanton boys who kill for them for their sport’. Inherent in these words is the truth that the mightiest warrior like him has also to bow down before Fate or God. The gods who intervene and direct the fortunes of men are shown as immortal men while men rising to their full might and potential like *Achilles* and *Hector* are mortal gods. Again to quote **Charlotte Higgins**,

The poem's gods, who urge on the fighters and intervene to help their favored heroes, are flimsy and flippant compared to their mortal counterparts ... The life-and-death struggles of the human characters seem weightier and more agonizingly present when set against the meaningless existence of the gods. This is a hard world: the war isn't “for” anything, certainly not some greater good, but is merely part of the blind workings of an inexplicable fate that even Zeus, king of the gods, must bow to. When the warriors die, there are no flights of angels to sing them to their rest, only the prospect of a ghastly, ghostly, absence of meaning.

Hector is killed. It is the turn of the Trojans and in particular the aged father, *Priam* to feel the heart ache that *Achilles* had felt over the loss of *Patroclus*. Book 24 is unique as it deals with happenings off the battle field. While *Achilles* is shown as a relentless and merciless warrior on the battle field, rejecting the opponents' supplication to be spared, *Priam's* supplication to *Achilles* to restore his son's body exemplifies the values of humanity and fellow feeling. **Donald Lateiner** in his ‘Probe and survey Non verbal Behaviours in *Iliad* 24’ writes: “*Priam's self degradation, his postural abasement before Achilles, is the necessary price for the recovery of his son's body, the supremely valuable ‘social artifact’*. *Priam's* humble supplication, his gesture of taking and kissing his son's slayer's hands is an example of a new kind of heroism- an exhibition of egoless humility in defeat. This is heroism off the battle field- a recognition

of the might and power of his opponent and a willing shedding of his ego in the larger context of honouring his son who had met with a heroic end. It is *Priam*, the King, who kneels before *Achilles*, a warrior. *Achilles* sees the image of his own father in *Priam*. The two feel and experience a sense of common grief over human loss and in that shared pain, they come together. *Achilles* takes *Priam*'s arm and honours him by inviting him to share a meal with him. *Priam* and *Achilles* recognise their essential identity with each other- and with all other men. It is two equal killings- that of *Patroclus* by *Hector* and that of *Hector* by *Achilles* that brings the war to an end. The two men- the old King and the young warrior who were sworn enemies become friends, “when they become aware of their common loss as a result of the Iliadic war.” The *Iliad* ends with the return of *Hector*'s body to Troy and that signals the reconciliatory end of the Iliadic war. “In the beginning there was no beginning/ And in the end no end,” (Christopher Logue) encapsulates the Homeric essence of war's ultimate balance between the contending foes.

Check Your Progress 3

1) How does the Iliad end?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

- The Unit has discussed War in the Homeric Age and in our present age.
- It delineates the different facets of war.
 - The two sides of War in the context of honour and horror are discussed.
 - We have taken a brief look into the sequels of the Iliad that show the horrors of war.
 - The final reconciliation between Hector's father and Achilles is an example of heroism off the battlefield.

3.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

2. Refer to section 3.2

Check Your Progress 2

1. Refer to section 3.3

Check Your Progress 3

1. Refer to section 3.4

3.7 GLOSSARY

<i>Antithetical</i>	: sharply contrasted in character or purpose
<i>Surreptitiousness</i>	: being covert and deceptive
<i>Subterfuge</i>	: falsehood, pretext
<i>Cloak and dagger</i>	: refers to situations involving intrigue, secrecy, espionage, or mystery. The phrase has two possible origins.
<i>Euphoric</i>	: a great feeling of elation

UNIT 4 TOWARDS A POLITICAL ETHICS: MORAL PHILOSOPHY OR CULTURAL NORMS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Excerpts from Book 24
- 4.2 Lessons from the War
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions
- 4.6 Glossary
- 4.7 Suggested Readings & References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous units we discussed the hero of the *Iliad* and the twin aspects of war that bestows honour on the victor and horror on the victims. In this unit:

- We will discuss whether the *Iliad* is just a narration of events presenting the seamy side of human action of violence, anger, revenge and frenzy or if it has a moral philosophy to offer. (This is best understood from Book 24 when King *Priam* meets *Achilles* the Greek warrior and slayer of *Hector*, his (*Priam*'s) son.)
- We give excerpts from the last Book that details the meeting between *Priam* and *Achilles*.
- We look at the morals and political ethics depicted in the *Iliad*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Prince *Paris* of Troy elopes with *Helen*, the wife of King *Menealaus*, the younger brother of the great King *Agamemnon*. In order to regain their honour, the Greeks go to war with the Trojans, lead by *Agamemnon*, *Menealaus* and *Achilles* the great warrior. There is a falling out between *Agamemnon* and *Achilles* over a slave girl; hence, *Achilles* refuses to fight. The Greeks start losing the war. *Achilles*' friend *Patroclus* is killed by *Hector*. In retaliation *Achilles* kills *Hector* and drags his body all over the battle field. War is going on in the background. What does such a depiction say about war, the reasons for battle, and the outcomes? In the *Iliad* we realise, that the Trojan War is actually a case of bruised egos and honours. The two nations/republics go to war over the elopement of *Helen* and *Paris*. It is the ethos of bravery, the age of valour but was this valour to be utilised for regaining lost honour alone? Would such a motivation for battle leave a lot of collateral damage? The answer is yes, as we realise that half the actions of the *Iliad* are dictated by:

- The elopement of *Helen* with *Paris*
- The demand for the return and surrender of *Chryser*'s slave girl as a part of the war booty. The outcome of the battle again is clear as *Hector* the Trojan has a clear indication of his impending death in the battle, while *Achilles* and the Greeks emerge victorious.

In the next section we shall look at some of the excerpts from Book 24 of the *Iliad* that examine the notion of the Trojan War.

4.2 EXCERPTS FROM BOOK 24

The passages italicised highlight the nobility of *Priam* and *Achilles*.

BkXXIV:468-551 *Priam* moves *Achilles*' heart

With that, Hermes left for high Olympus, while Priam climbed down from his chariot, leaving Idaeus to handle the horses and mules. The old king went straight to the hut frequented by Zeus-beloved Achilles. He found him there, with only the warrior Automedon and warlike Alcimus of all his friends. They were busy attending to his meal. The table stood at his side but he had finished eating and drinking.

Great Priam slipped in unobserved, and reaching Achilles, clasped his knees, and kissed his hands, the fearful, man-killing hands that had slaughtered so many of his sons. Achilles was astonished at the sight of godlike Priam, as were his friends.

They stared at each other, astounded, as men do in the hall of a wealthy nobleman, when a stranger, who has murdered a man in a moment of frenzy in his own country, seeking refuge abroad, bursts in on them.

Priam was already entreating Achilles: 'Godlike Achilles, think of your own father, who is of my generation, and so is likewise on the sad threshold of old age. Perhaps his neighbours are troubling him, and there is no one to protect him from harm, or ward off ruin. But he at least can rejoice in the knowledge that you live, and each day brings the hope of seeing you return from Troy.'



'(Priam pleads for Hector's body)' - Workshop of Bernard Picart, 1710

While I, I am a victim of sad fate. Of the best of my sons, the best in all of Troy, not one is left. Fifty sons I had, when you Achaeans landed, nineteen by the one wife, and the rest by other ladies of my court. Most of them have fallen in furious battle, and the defender of the city and its people, my prime recourse, Hector, you have killed, as he fought for his country. I come now to the ships to beg his corpse from you, bringing a princely ransom. Respect the gods, Achilles, and show mercy towards me, remembering your own father, for I am more to be pitied than he, since I have brought myself to do what no other man on earth would do, I have lifted to my lips the hand of the man who killed my sons.'

His words had moved Achilles to tears at the thought of his own father, and taking the old man's hands he set him gently from him, while both were lost in memory. Priam remembered man-killing Hector, and wept aloud, at Achilles' feet, while Achilles wept for his father Peleus and for Patroclus once more, and the sound of their lament filled the hut.

But when Achilles was sated with weeping, and the force of grief was spent, he rose instantly from his chair, and raising the old king by his arm, he took pity on his grey beard and hair, and spoke eloquently to him: 'You are indeed unfortunate, and your heart has endured much sorrow. Surely, though, there is iron in your spirit, daring to come alone to our ships, and face the man who slew so many of your noble sons? Come, sit here, and we will shut away our sorrows, despite our grief, since there is but cold comfort in lament. The gods have spun the thread of fate for wretched mortals: we live in sorrow, while they are free from care. Two urns stand in Zeus' palace containing the experiences he grants mortals, one holds blessings, the other ills. Those who receive a mixture of the two meet with good and ill, but those whom the Thunderer only serves from the jar of ills becomes an outcast, driven over the face of the earth by despair, a wanderer honoured neither by gods nor men. See how the gods showered glorious gifts on my father Peleus, from the moment of his birth, wealth and possessions beyond other men, kingship of the Myrmidons, and though but a mortal man, a goddess for a wife. Yet some god brought evil even to him, no crowd of princes, but an only son doomed to an untimely end. He receives no care from me, since I sit here in the land of Troy, far from my own country, bringing harm to you and your children. And you, my aged lord, they say you once were happy, renowned for your wealth and your sons, in all the lands, from the isle of Lesbos, where Macar reigned, through upper Phrygia to the boundless Hellespont. But from the moment that the heavenly gods brought this wretched war upon you, all has turned to battle and slaughter. Endure, let your heart not grieve forever; Sorrowing for your son will achieve nothing, you'll not bring him back to life, though life will bring you other sorrows.'

BkXXIV: 552-620 Achilles releases Hector's corpse to Priam

'Do not ask me to sit down, beloved of Zeus,' replied the aged king, 'while Hector's corpse lies neglected by the huts, but give him back to me swiftly so my eyes can gaze on him, and accept the ransom, the princely ransom, I bring. May you have joy of it, and return to your native land, since you have shown me mercy from the first.'

Fleet-footed Achilles frowning answered him; 'I need no urging, old man. I have decided to return Hector's body to you. My own mother, the daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, brought me a message from Zeus. And I know in my heart, such things don't escape me, that some god led you to our swift ships. No mortal man, not even a strong young warrior, would dare to venture into this camp, nor having done so elude the guards, nor shift the bar across the gate. So don't try to move my heart further, lest I defy Zeus' command and choose, suppliant though you are, not to spare even you.'

The old king, gripped by fear, was silent. Then the son of *Peleus* ran from the hut, followed by his two companions, *Automedon* and *Alcimus* the dearest of his friends after dead *Patroclus*. They un-harnessed the mules and horses, brought in the old king's herald his crier, and offered him a chair. Then from the well-made cart they lifted down the princely ransom for *Hector's* body.

They left there two white cloaks and a fine tunic, so that the corpse could be wrapped in them, before he gave it back to *Priam* to take home.

Achilles then summoned two servant-girls and ordered them to wash and anoint the body, first carrying it to a place where Priam could not see his son, lest his grief at the sight provoke his anger and Achilles be angered in reply, and kill him in defiance of Zeus' command. When the servant-girls had done washing the body and anointing it with oil, and had dressed it in the fine tunic and wrapped it in a cloak, Achilles himself placed it on a bier, and he and his comrades lifted it into the wooden cart. Then he sighed and called his dead friend by name: 'Patroclus, do not be angered, if even in the House of Hades you learn that I have returned noble Hector to his dear father, who has given a princely ransom. Even of that you shall have your rightful share.'

With this, noble Achilles returned to the hut and sat down again on his richly inlaid chair opposite Priam, saying: 'Venerable lord, your son's body has been placed on a bier and I shall release it to you as you wished. At dawn you may look on him, and carry him back, but now let us eat. Even long-haired Niobe eventually thought to eat, though her twelve children had been slain, six daughters, six sons in their prime. Apollo angry that Niobe had boasted of bearing so many children compared with Leto who had borne but two, killed the sons with arrows from his silver bow, while his sister Artemis killed the daughters. The pair slew them all, and left them lying in their blood, for nine days, since Zeus had turned the people to stone and there was no one to bury the corpses. On the tenth day the heavenly gods gave them burial, and only then did Niobe, exhausted by her grief, take sustenance. Now, turned to stone herself, she stands among the crags on the desolate slopes of Sipylus, where men say the Nymphs that dance on the banks of Achelous take their rest, and broods on the sorrows the gods sent her. Come let us too take sustenance, venerable lord: in Ilium you can lament your son once more, and grieve for him with a flood of tears.'

BkXXIV:621-676 Achilles agrees to a truce for Hector's funeral

Swift Achilles sprang to his feet, and went and slaughtered a white-fleeced sheep, which his men flayed and prepared. They chopped it deftly, spitted the pieces, roasted them carefully, and then drew them from the spits. Automedon set out bread in neat baskets, while Achilles served the meat, and they helped themselves to the good things placed before them.

When they had sated their hunger and thirst, Dardanian Priam contemplated Achilles and how marvellously tall and handsome he was, the very image of a god. Achilles too marvelled, at Priam's nobility and eloquence. When they had gazed at each other to their heart's content, godlike king Priam said: 'Beloved of Zeus, show me to my bed now, so that, lulled by sweet sleep, we may find ease in rest. My eyes have not closed since my son lost his life at your hands. Then I lamented and brooded over my endless sorrows, and grovelled in the dirt in my courtyard. Now I have tasted food and wetted my throat with red wine, who until now tasted nothing.'

Now Achilles ordered his friends and the servant-girls to set up bedsteads in the portico, cover them with fine purple blankets, and spread sheets above, and fleecy mantles on top to keep the guests warm. Torch in hand, the girls left the room and swiftly busied themselves at the task. Then fleet-footed Achilles spoke to Priam in a cooler tone: 'You must sleep outside,

venerable lord, in case one of the countless counsellors of the Achaeans comes to sit and talk with me, as is right. If he saw you, in the swift passage of darkness, he might hasten to King Agamemnon, and then the return of the corpse to you would be delayed. Now, tell me truly, how long do you need for noble Hector's funeral. I will keep truce myself for that length of time, and restrain the army.'

The godlike old king answered him: 'You would be doing me a great kindness Achilles, if you indeed allow me time to bury Hector. You know the city is surrounded, and the Trojans would fear to fetch wood from the far hills, otherwise. We will lament him nine days in the palace, and carry out the rites on the tenth. Then on the eleventh day we will raise his barrow, and the people feast. If we must, we will fight again on the twelfth.'

Fleet-footed Achilles replied: 'It shall be as you say, aged Priam, and I will restrain the army for that length of time.'

With that, he clasped the old man's right wrist, to reassure him. Then Priam and Idaeus the herald lay down to sleep in the portico, their minds still full of thoughts, while Achilles slept in the inner recess of his well-built hut, with the lovely Briseis by his side.

4.3 LESSONS FROM THE WAR

We have analysed the meaningful measure of the gains and losses of war in Unit III. One of the problems about the *Iliad* is that it does not hold out any guidance or direction as to how to live life. This was first stated by the Greek philosopher **Plato**, (427B.C -347 B.C) who rejected **Homer's** *Iliad* for not offering any constructive moral but limiting itself to the portrayal of the 'shadowy world of human actions'. There is no doubt that the poem reflects the bloody side of war and presents the gory details of fight and the humbling and dishonouring of the losers in the most inhuman manner. Even the *Mahabharata* details ghastly spectacles of violence such as *Shishpala's* decapitation, *Duryodhana's* repeated attempts at murdering *Bheema* and the *Pandavas*, the public molestation of *Draupadi*, *Aswathama's* slaying of all the five sons of *Draupadi* and finally the annihilation of the *Kuru* clan in the war. The great epic story brings several instances of graphic violence to the audience. But the *Mahabharata* is remarkable for the broad secularism within the parameter of spirituality that underlines the *Bhagavad Gita*. But this seems to be missing in the *Iliad* as **Plato** feels that **Homer** does not offer any moral or political ethic and the war does not uphold any lessons for humanity.

But if we read the poem which has for its theme 'rage', we learn the first lesson that rage breeds rage; violence breeds violence. We recognise the violent consequences of anger as seen in *Achilles'* refusal to enter the battlefield till Book XIX, resulting in the destruction of the Greek army (with equal losses to the Trojan army), *Patroclus'* entry into the battlefield with *Achilles'* protective armour after the Greeks are humiliated, his rout of the Trojans, his killing of *Sarpedon* and the fight over his body, the revenge slaying of *Patroclus* by *Hector*, the fight over *Patroclus'* body leading to *Achilles'* entry into the battlefield, his killing of *Hector* and driving with *Hector's* corpse. The unmitigated, horrendous description of war violence is rendered in a matter of fact tone as though it is a running commentary on the war with the commentators taking no side. But prior to the enactment of the war scenes let us read the story as given below:

Patroclus, hot tears pouring down his face like a stream of dark water flowing in dusky streaks down the face of a sheer cliff, returned to Achilles, leader of men. Noble Achilles, the fleet of foot, saw and pitied him, and spoke to him with winged words: 'Why are you crying like a little girl, Patroclus, like a child running by her mother's side, begging to be carried, clutching at her skirt to make her stop, and tearfully looking up until her mother takes her in her arms? Your teardrops fall like hers, Patroclus

So then, now that a dark cloud of Trojans hems in the ships so closely, and we Greeks, confined to a narrow space, have nothing left at our backs but the shore, clasp your shoulders in my glorious armour, and lead my Myrmidons, who love a fight, to battle. It seems the whole of Troy attacks us fearlessly, now they can see no sign of my helm, its visor gleaming in their faces. They would soon fill the riverbeds with their dead, and not be warring round our camp, if Agamemnon were but warm towards me... Yet you must take the fight to them, and save the fleet from ruin, Patroclus, for our means of escape is lost once they set fire to the ships. Listen while I give you my advice, and you can win glory for me, and recompense from these Danaans, the return of that lovely girl and fine gifts as well. When you have driven them from the ships, come back to me.

Can you identify *Achilles'* deep feeling of love for his country, his words of mighty inspiration to *Patroclus* to be brave and to fight on his behalf and the soft side to his personality beneath his angry visage? His loyalty to his fellow soldiers, his great feeling of love and companionship towards *Patroclus* and his selfless offer of his armour for his friend to don clearly indicate that all is not rage in the Homeric world.

We have discussed in Unit III about *Hector* and his bonding with his family, his loyalty to his King and father, *Priam*, and his nobility to overcome his detestation of his brother *Paris'* foolish act of running home with the enemy leader's wife, *Helen*.

The epic is also a pointer to a new political ethic that was not a part of the Homeric world. The ancient Greek society valued war heroics much more than civilised behaviour as evidenced from the honour bestowed upon brutal, insensate killing and barbaric slaughter of men, women and children. But despite all the display of wanton savagery and destruction, one notices a glimpse of human innerness as against the criticism that Homeric man has no innerness and therefore as **James Redfield** argues, "*is incapable of development because he responds fully and uncritically to each situation.*"

It is important to understand that however self centred the Homeric hero is, honour is not how society values him as how he values himself in his own eyes. The Homeric aspiration is to personify the ideals of society by living up to those ideals and thereby rising in one's own self esteem. *Hector* despite his love for his wife and son knows that he will be criticised and mocked at, if he stays back with his family without entering the battlefield. "*Esteem ... is an image of oneself in relationship to other*", as **Dean Hammer** suggests. This self esteem is an awareness of one's failure to live up to the ideals of the society and therefore liable to be criticised.

We see this more in Book XIV. Read through the excerpts and realise the importance of self esteem which arises from meeting the cultural and political expectations of the society. When *Achilles* refuses to fight because of his dispute with *Agamemnon*, we must realise that his self esteem has been hurt. The focus

on self esteem is a corrective to the criticism that Homer has no lessons to offer. It also explains the development of *Achilles'* character. As stated above the violation to his self esteem, the challenge to his superiority is what makes him take a vow not to fight. The failure of the Greek army in his absence makes him partially relent and he persuades *Patroclus* - almost his alter ego, in the sense of an inseparable friend- to do the fighting on his behalf. It is one way of restoring his damaged reputation of self esteem by staying away from the war. *Patroclus'* death is the catalyst that spurs him to realise his self worth and raise himself in esteem in his own eyes. He recovers lost ground and transforms himself from a sulking egoistical person with wounded pride to elevate himself to his true worth as he enters the battlefield. It is in his dialogue with *Priam*, he feels the vicarious experience of a father's grief by imagining what his own father would feel if he (*Achilles*) were to be killed. According to Kevin Zcrott, his empathy with *Priam's* distress reveals how from "*the most rudimentary sense of the self... he reforms or restructures his sense of himself to appreciate the similarity of another's experience to his own*"

Kevin Crott continues: "*the hero of this epic does not come to terms with our own expectations of his humanity when he encounters face to face, in the epic's near-final scene of vicarious grief, the mourning father of his deadliest enemy. The ceremony of supplication that takes place at this moment in the Iliad creates an emotional effect so powerful—and so troubling—that it will take another epic, this time, the Odyssey, to follow up on its resonances.*" *Achilles* sees in *Priam's* grief a reflection of his own experience of grief, and out of this experience comes "*a vision of elemental human solidarity*" that binds *Achilles* and *Priam*, and by extension all human beings. Human solidarity transcends the individual heroic weaknesses such as the ego of *Achilles*, the lust of *Paris*, the greed of *Agamemnon*, the momentary cowardice of *Hector*, the rage of *Achilles* and shows human connectedness.

Activity

- 1) It will be of interest to read the *Odyssey* to recognise the emotional experiences of *Odysseus*, another great Greek hero.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

Plato is both correct and incorrect. He is correct in saying that **Homer** holds the mirror to the seamy side of life-violence, horror, disgust, anger, lust, merciless butchering. But he is incorrect to see no political ethics in the poem. **Dean Hammer** says "*The epic moves us to a comprehension of a political and ethical relationship to others, a relationship that is grounded not on the philosophic world of autonomy, universality, invulnerability and transcendence, but in the Homeric world of contingency, particularity, vulnerability and immanence.*" In the final analysis, the poem gives us a "*recognition of a shared world, a recognition that arises not from outside but from within a world constituted by experience.*"

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with Plato's criticism that the *Iliad* offers no morals? Give your answer with examples.

4.6 GLOSSARY

<i>Thunderer</i>	: Zeus
<i>Myrmidions</i>	: a follower or subordinate of a powerful person, typically one who is unscrupulous or carries out orders unquestioningly.

<i>Niobe</i>	: the prototype of the bereaved mother, weeping for the loss of her children.
<i>Leto</i>	: Goddess of womanly motherhood
<i>House of Hades</i>	: abode of the dead, the netherworld
<i>Nymphs</i>	: in ancient Greek mythology, female deities of nature, living in the mountains, forests, seas, and springs. The nymphs are believed to be daughters of Zeus
<i>Ilium</i>	: Troy
<i>Dardanian</i>	: the inhabitant of Troy
<i>Barrow</i>	: A large mound of earth or stones placed over a burial site.
<i>Clad</i>	: cover
<i>Danaans</i>	: <i>Achaean</i> , Greek people whom Homer identifies as the besiegers of Troy. Their capital was Mycenae.
<i>Innerness</i>	: of or pertaining to the mind or spirit; mental; spiritual
<i>Empathy</i>	: the power of entering into another's personality and imaginatively experiencing his feelings.
<i>Immanence</i>	: Existing or remaining within; inherent
<i>Contingency</i>	: The condition of being dependent on chance; uncertainty.

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