

# A STUDY OF JOHN MILTON'S ANALYSIS OF "PARADISE LOST" WITH EPIC POEM

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## ABSTRACT

An epic in its most specific sense is a genre of classical poetry originating in Greece. The word epic is derived from the ancient Greek adjective, epikos, which means a poetic story. In Literature, an epic is a long narrative poem, which is usually related to heroic deeds of a person of an inexplicable courage and unequalled bravery. In order to depict this bravery and courage, the epic uses grandiose style. An Epic poem is a lengthy narrative poem ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation. One is taken from the sacred texts of Christianity "Bible" and the other from the great Indian epic "The Ramayana". But there is a common underlying principle that marks these two epic poems.

**KEYWORDS:** Paradise Loss, Epic, classical poetry.

## INTRODUCTION

An epic in its most specific sense is a genre of classical poetry originating in Greece. The word epic is derived from the ancient Greek adjective, epikos, which means a poetic story. In Literature, an epic is a long narrative poem, which is usually related to heroic deeds of a person of an inexplicable courage and unequalled bravery. In order to depict this bravery and courage, the epic uses grandiose style. An Epic poem is a lengthy narrative poem ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation. Milman Pary and Albert Lord have argued about the forms of Homeric epics, the earliest works of western literature which is in Oral poetic forms. Another type of Epic poetry is Epyllion, a brief narrative poem with Romantic or Mythological theme in it. Some of the most famous example of epic poetry includes the Ancient Greek Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil's Aeneid. The ancient Indian Ramayana and Mahabharata, Dante's Divine Comedy, John Milton's Paradise Lost and several others.

## CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

- An epic is a long poem or other work of art celebrating heroic feats.
- Epic comes from the Greek for song because Greek poets like Homer sung their poems.
- A long, narrative poem written in elevated style
- The heroes is of great historical or legendary importance performing valorous deeds.
- The setting of an epic is vast covering great Nations, the world, or the Universe.
- The action is important for the destiny of the Nation or of the people.
- It leaves or inculcates moral values or ideas.
- Examples: - Homer's Iliad, Virgil's Aeneid, Milton's Paradise Lost, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's Meghanadbadh Kavya.

## CONVENTIONS OF EPIC

- All epic begins with invocation(prayer to muse).
- Hero is a figure of great cosmic or national importance.
- He has superhuman traits, he has an expressive physical structure.
- Setting of an epic is vast,It covers a wide surface of geographical distance.
- The action of the hero showcase deeds of valour and courage.
- Intervention of supernatural forces.
- The style of writing the epic is ceremonial with the use of Homeric similes in it.
- Narrative opens in "In medias res" (in the middle of things).
- The hero is in such a point of juncture that he has lost everything.
- Use of catalogues or Genealogy.
- Use of formal speeches and monologues.
- Every epic should describe the armament of a hero.
- Use of stock phrases(which repeat phrases again and again)

## MILTON'S PARADISE LOST AS AN EPIC POEM

Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th century English poet John Milton (1608-1674). The first version published in 1667, consisted of ten books with over ten thousand lines of verse . A second edition published in 1674, arranged into twelve books( in the manner of Virgil's Aeneid) with minor revisions throughout the book and a note on the versification . The poem concerns the biblical story of the fall of Man; the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angels Satan to their utter damnation (i.e. their expulsion from the Garden Of Eden). Milton's purpose of writing this epic poem as stated in Book-1, is to "justify the ways of God to Men". The poem is separated into twelve books or sections, the length of which varies greatly. The poem follows the epic tradition of starting "In Medias Res" (Latin for in the midst of things), the background of the story being recounted later. Milton's story has two narrative arcs, one from the perspective of Satan (Lucifer) and the other following the downfall of Adam and Eve. It begins after Satan and the other rebel angels have been defeated by the Almighty God and thrown to Hell as a punishment. The poem begins from Satan's perspective- his deliberate plans to reconquer Heavens and shook God's position from there, his indomitable courage and unconquerable will that enable him to put forth the battle forward. It has also the story of Adam and Eve, their temptation and finally their ultimate downfall which makes it a new kind of epic:- a domestic one. It follows the other epic conventions i.e;

1. It begins with Invocation.
2. It has a hero of national importance.
3. The action of the hero showcases deeds of valour and courage.
4. Homeric Similes.
5. It opens with "In Medias Res".
6. Use of Catalogues or Genealogy and others.

It is long(epics usually are, although that is not their defining characteristic!) and addresses the collective imagination of his culture—the identification of Christians with their own foundation myths as described in Hebrew scriptures. This is part of what makes Milton's poem an epic.

## MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT'S MEGHNADBADH KAVYA AS AN EPIC POEM

Meghnadbadh kavya(The Saga of Meghnad's killing) is the most famous and most acclaimed poem by the poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt. It is based on the demise of Meghnad(a.k.a Indrajit),son of Ravan, the villain of the classic Sanskrit epic Ramayana.It was first published in 1861, incidentally the year of birth of the Bengali Author Rabindranath Tagore, who afterwards wrote a review on it. The Ballad is divided into 9 different Sargas, i.e; parts. Each part exhibits different incidents. Starting from the death Beerbahu, son of

Ravana, it is continued till the Sati-daha of Prameela, Meghnad's beloved wife. Ravana, along with his sons were the ones performing evil deeds in the Ramayana, which was originally written in Sanskrit by the sage Valmiki. Butt Dutt claims to have found a tragic hero in Ravana, as he was conversant with Western literature. He feels a shadow of Hector of Troy in Meghnad. According to him, he realized the cause of Ravana's heinous crimes. He says that Meghnad was worshipping Lord Shiva, while Lakshmana attacked him with help of Meghnad's uncle, Bhivishana. This unfortunate hero twice endangered Rama but could not survive in this relentless battle. This is the central theme of this epic. Here Meghnad is shown to be a Patriot, a loving husband, a caring son and a friend to his countrymen. There are some necessary points that Dutt kept in mind for the completion of this kind of epic:- 1. First and foremost he needed a language. 2. His invention of Blank Verse. 3. He also needs a Subject. 4. The slant or tone of the epic. 5. His influence from West like Mahabharata and Ramayana and also from European sources of Inspiration. Madhusudan wanted to be like Homer: to take an inchoate tradition and give it lasting, cogent literary shape. So, he wrote an epic in nine books: everything planned and controlled the climax- the actual slaying of Meghnad, carefully placed at the end of Book vi-not too near the end of the poem, any more than Milton placed the eating of the forbidden fruit too near the end of Paradise Lost. It comes in Book ix, proportionally similar in position in Milton's twelve book epic to the death of Meghanad in Madhusudan's nine book epic.

## EPICS (MILTON'S PARADISE LOST AND MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT'S)

### • Invocation and Prologue.

Every now and then in the history of Literature, a poet comes along with a truly ambitious project: to embody his entire language in a major work, to speak for a whole nation or community to give it a classic touch to which subsequent generations can again and again be recapitulated. In Europe, one thinks of Dante, setting out "to purify the dialect of the tribe"; Edmund Spenser, glorifying in "The Fairie Queene", Queen Elizabeth I and her national and religious settlements; Milton giving covert warnings in Paradise Lost in order for the regicides of Puritanism; or of Wordsworth, linking the English sense of Nationhood irrevocably to her Northern lakes and hills and so on. Madhusudan set out to do that for Bengali, and even today his audacity and his achievement are brilliantly concealed and everlasting in all of his works. He gave Modern Bengali literature, its only true classic "Meghnadbadh kavya" to return in each generation to find new meanings in it every time. In order to start with the structure of Milton's Paradise Lost, I want to mention some of the Miltonic conception in Paradise Lost which includes the Invocation, prosodic structure, thematic structure and imagery and symbolism.

The invocation in Paradise lost includes the subsequent four invocations distributed at significant points in the course of the poem (Book 1,3,7 and 9). The first is the most important because it begins the whole poem. The second invocation introduces books 3 and 4 in which Satan finds his way to Eden and discovers Adam and Eve. The third invocation introduces Raphael's account of the creation in Book 7 and 8. The fourth and final

invocation changes the Poetic mood, acclaiming the Fall which occupies the final four books of this epic poem.

### • Epic Hero

The epic must center on the Hero. This seems obvious. But in the “idea” or “study” epic the poem centers on the hero in such a way that through the hero the secondary purpose of the epic is fulfilled. First of all, the hero is always a noble character. Secondly, he is an important person among his fellow men. Thirdly, he is a friend of the Gods(or of God) and receives favours from them. Finally, around him the poem centers or to sum it all up in a definition, we may say that an epic hero is an important person of noble and generosity who is divinely favored by Gods and Goddesses and around whom the poem centers. Milton devotes much time and energy to portraying Satan and his supporters. Many more rebel angels than good angels are mentioned in the poem and they are more efficiently characterized. Satan himself is by general agreement the most vivid and lucid character in *Paradise Lost*, indeed for some readers he is also the de facto hero of the poem. So marked is his dominance as to lead doubts in the mind of some critics, notably William Blake about the success of Milton’s essential enterprise and the central theme of the poem-“to justify the ways of God to Men”. Writers and critics of the Romantic era advanced the notion that Satan was a promethean hero, pitting himself against an unjust God. Satan himself is a character of indomitable courage and unconquerable will. He does not repent or changes, he boasts.

### • Epic Similes

In the context of figure of speech, the next comparison comes between the epic similes of *Paradise Lost* and *Meghanadbadh kavya*. Epic simile, also called Homeric simile, an extended simile often running to several lines, used typically in epic poetry to intensify the heroic stature of the subject and to serve for decoration. The epic similes used by Homer in his epic poem is long tailed, detached, digressive and illustrative. Same as, the similes used by Milton is also long tailed, detached, digressive and explanatory. According to Walter Raleigh; “the epic similes ennoble though it does not illustrate”. Sometimes the epic similes used by poet is also treated as an instrument to deceive or cheat the readers. They serve as the secondary function of the poem. Same as, Milton has also used the epic similes to deceive and cheat the readers in an implicit way. Appropriately the first epic simile in Book-1 describe the poem’s main character, Satan;-

[Satan] lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge/ As whom the Fables name of monstrous size,/ Titanian, or Earthborn, that warr’d on Jove,/ Briareos or Typhoon whom the Den/ By ancient Tarsus held....(1.196-200). Milton establishes, again using an epic convention in comparing Satan’s huge stature with Titans, the physically huge precursors of the Greek and Roman gods. Satan’s shield hung on his shoulders is described in epic terms: “the broad circumference/ Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb/ Through Optic Glass....” This simile is particularly important because it emphasizes the large scale of everybody and

everything in the poem and it also shows that Milton was interested in Astronomy. His mention of the inventions of Galileo's telescope shows his utmost interest for Astronomy. The simile in which Milton establishes not only the size (numberless) of Satan's army of fallen angels but also compares them to the Locusts called up by Moses in order to get the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt is also remarkable. There are also other such similes as Vallombrosa simile, Leviathan simile all used to indicate the huge stature of Satan and also the innumerable fallen angels who lay prone on the flood. Milton's goal in using such similes is to create a Christian epic, using the conventions of Homeric epic.

## CONCLUSION

The poem is separated into twelve books or sections, the length of which varies greatly. The poem follows the epic tradition of starting "In Medias Res" (Latin for in the midst of things), the background of the story being recounted later. Milton's story has two narrative arcs, one from the perspective of Satan (Lucifer) and the other following the downfall of Adam and Eve. It begins after Satan and the other rebel angels have been defeated by the Almighty God and thrown to Hell as a punishment. The poem begins from Satan's perspective- his deliberate plans to reconquer Heavens and shook God's position from there, his indomitable courage and unconquerable will that enable him to put forth the battle forward. So from the above study we can easily conclude that the two epics compared (Milton's Paradise Lost), though from the two different time periods have common epic conventions. So, we can conclude that:-

- All Epic begins with Invocation and Prologue.
- Hero is a figure of great cosmic or national importance.
- Settings of an epic is vast, it covers a wide surface of Geographical distance.
- The action of the hero showcases deeds of Valour and courage.
- The style of writing the epic is ceremonial with the use of Homeric similes in it.

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