

A Study on Mahabharata as the greatest example of Shruti Parampara

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Abstract

Mahabharata can be seen as the strongest and widest expression of the Shruti Parampara of the Indian Knowledge System. Shruti is a sacred form of Bhartiya knowledge system that is heard and memorised. Shruti Parampara is the living chain of teachers and students that keeps this knowledge alive. Mahabharata is not a story of a war, but as a big teaching ground where ideas from the Vedas, about the world and about dharma, are turned into stories, life talks, and clear lessons to learn. Central to this transformative process is the Shrimad Bhagwat Gita and Shri Krishan and Arjun Dialogues which is the heart of Mahabharata and a foundation of shruti Parampara.

Through this paper it is an effort to look how Mahabharata is passed on from generations through guru–shishya tradition, chanting, and oral storytelling. It shows how repetition, set phrases, questions–answers, and frame stories help people remember and share huge philosophical wisdom without mistake. In this way, the Mahabharata works like a “people’s Shruti”: it brings Vedic wisdom down to the level of everyday life so that common people can hear it, remember it, and learn lessons and values.

The research will try to argue how Mahabharata focus on listening, memory, and live performance can guide modern education system and media. In a time when people depend on digital devices for memory and have short attention spans, the Mahabharata as the greatest expression of Shruti Parampara offers a rooted model for deep listening, value education, and meaningful communication.



Key Words: Mahabharat, Shruti Parampara, Indian Knowledge System, Guru–shishya tradition, Oral transmission, Memory and recitation, Vedic wisdom

Introduction

Ancient Bharat consists of a “treasure house of knowledge” and the ancestors transmitted the legacy with the oral knowledge tradition of the ancient Bharat, the Shruti Parampara. Shruti Parampara refers to the highly disciplined oral tradition through which the Vedas has been transmitted from teachers to students across generations. In this knowledge system, sacred knowledge is not primarily protected by writing but with living relation between the Guru and Shishya. Students use to spend a lot of time in mastering exact pronunciation, accent and rhythm of the Vedic mantras through repeating listening and recitation.

Within the Indian Knowledge System framework, Shruti Parampara represents a core communication technology. Mahabharata, though classified as Smriti rather than Shruti, emerges from and flourishes within this same oral culture. Its narrative, character, and discourse on Dharma have circulated from centuries through recitation, performance and regional re-telling acting as dynamic bridge between the exact, mantra based Shruti tradition and the fluid, interpretive world of lived popular memory.

In this context, this paper explores the epic Mahabharata as the greatest example of Shruti Parampara at the level of method and communication practice. It focuses especially on the Bhagavad Gita dialogues, the Dhritarashtra–Sanjaya narration, and the Vyasa–Ganesha episode as prominent illustrations of Shruti-style transmission in the epic.

Methodology

In order to examine Mahabharata as the greatest example of Shruti Parampara, this study adopts a qualitative, textual interpretive methodology centred on close reading of primary scriptures and key commentarial traditions. The primary focus is on the Mahabharata with special emphasis on the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, the Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya dialogues, and the Vyasa and shri Ganesha composition narrative, which are analysed as condensed sites of Shruti Parampara communication.

The method used in this paper involves systematic identification of Shruti-like features within the epic direct appeals to “hear,” repetitive formulae, dialogic question–answer patterns, lineage-based authority (guru–shishya chains), and scenes of live oral performance.



Each selected passage is coded under thematic categories such as listening, memory discipline, error-free recitation, and guru-centred pedagogy, and then interpreted in light of established descriptions of Vedic oral transmission and the Guru–Shishya Parampara. Comparative analysis is used to show how techniques normally associated with Vedic chanting such as precise repetition, internal verification, and embodiment of sound are re-worked in the epic Mahabharata to communicate dharma, ethics, and practical wisdom to a wider audience.

Shruti Parampara as a communication practice

Shruti Parampara refers to a traditional method of preserving and transmitting knowledge in the Indian Culture. Shruti literally means “that which is heard” and refers to the body of ancient texts which are considered to of divine origin primarily the Vedas. Parampara means a succession, indicating a transmission of knowledge from the Guru (teacher) to the Shishya (student) in an unbroken chain. The idea behind this oral transmission was that the purity and integrity of the knowledge could be preserved better through careful and precise recitation. (Jamison & Brereton, 2014)

Over the time this tradition developed into a rigorous and systematic processes of memorization. Unlike the written text, Shruti was transmitted orally, often in a highly precise and methodical manner. This requires students to memorize vast amount of material including not just the content but the exact pronunciation and tone, which were considered basic as the principal for the proper understanding and recitation. The transmission was often done using techniques like chanting or singing in fixed melodies called “sarva”. The integrity and the trust worthiness of the text relied heavily on this oral transmission.

Thus, this shows that Shruti Parampara is not only a religious or philosophical concept but also a sophisticated communication practice which is based on listening, repetition, embodiment of sound, and continuity of lineage.



Element	What it means in Shruti Parampara	Function in transmission
Svara (pitch patterns)	Fixed melodic patterns for chanting each mantra	Aids memory; makes errors immediately audible
Akshara precision	Exact articulation of each syllable and sandhi	Preserves meaning; prevents textual corruption
Recitation (pāṭha)	Systematic oral repetition of whole texts in set sequences	Ensures verbatim preservation over generations
Vedic chant rhythms	Regulated tempo, stress, and pauses	Creates a stable sound-form of the text
Memorization drills	Daily repetition, partial–full recall exercises	Transfers text from short-term to long-term
Cross-checking methods	Collective recitation, correction by guru and peers	Continuous quality control of the oral text
Lineage (śākhā/paramparā)	Specific schools of reciters preserving particular recensional traditions	Maintains diversity yet internal consistency

Table 1



Guru Shishya Parampara as the infrastructure of the Shruti Parampara

At the heart of the Guru Shishya Parampara lies the concept of the **guru**, which goes beyond the conventional notion of a teacher. A guru is a revered mentor, a guide who possesses not just knowledge but also wisdom extracted through experience and self-realization. The **shishya**, the disciple, is not a passive learner but an active participant, approaching the guru with utmost respect, devotion, and a thirst for knowledge.

Gurukuls

Gurukul is the place where the whole procedure of the learning takes place. It is basically the residence of the Guru. The shishya lived alongside the guru becoming part of the family. The immersive environment fostered a close relationship between a Guru and Shishya allowing the shishya to not only learn theoretical concepts but also observes the guru's daily life consuming their values and way of life.

The guru shishya Parampara emphasises a holistic approach to learn, knowledge was not confined to textbooks it encompassed through various aspects of life like the Oral Tradition, Practical Application and Character Development which states that knowledge was primarily transmitted orally, learning was not just theoretical and the guru focused not just on the intellectual growth but also to the shishya's character development. (Parimalagantham, 2014)

Element	Description in your paragraph	Role in Guru–Shishya / Shruti context
Gurukul as place	Residence of the guru where the whole learning process takes place	Creates a fixed physical centre for long-term learning
Living with the guru	Shishya lives alongside the guru as part of the family	Enables continuous, informal as well as formal learning



Element	Description in your paragraph	Role in Guru–Shishya / Shruti context
Immersive environment	Close relationship; shishya observes guru’s daily life, values, and way of living	Transmits lived dharma, not only theory
Beyond theoretical study	Learning is not limited to concepts or textbooks	Connects knowledge with real behaviour and choices
Oral tradition	Knowledge primarily transmitted orally	Keeps Shruti-style listening and recitation at the core of education
Practical application	Duties, services, and real-life practice as part of daily routine	Converts what is heard into action and embodied understanding
Character development	Guru focuses not only on intellectual growth but also on the shishya’s overall character and values	Aligns the learner’s inner self with the spirit of the transmitted knowledge

Table 2



Shruti Parampara and Mahabharata

This paper argues that although Mahabharata is classed as *smṛiti*, but at the same time it is the most powerful example of *shruti Parampara* as a communication method, because it uses the same oral techniques used in the Shruti Parampara like, dialogue, recitation, memory discipline and lineage to transmit the Vedic wisdom to the wider range of people. (Smith, 1990)

The same oral world that preserved Shruti also produced epics like Mahabharata. As Mahabharata is the greatest epic in the Sanatan Dharma uses the same as shruti Parampara to communicate its message which are listening, memorizing, and reciting with zero errors to prove the point we can take many examples from the epic Mahabharata starting with Shri Krishna's words to Arjun when he was in the dilemma in the war time in the battle field of Kurukshetra –

भूय एव महाबाहो शृणु मे परमं वचः ।

यत्तेऽहं प्रीयमाणाय वक्ष्यामि हितकाम्यया ॥१॥

(Bhagavad-Gītā 18.1, trans. Prabhupāda, 2008)

Meaning:

The Supreme Lord said, “O mighty-armed Arjuna, now hear further. Because you are my dear friend, for your benefit I shall give you such knowledge that is superior to the knowledge I have explained so far.”

Here Krishna is directly invoking the act of *śravaṇa* “hear from Me”—and building Arjuna's understanding through spoken words, which Arjuna must listen to, remember and act upon.

परं ब्रह्म परं धाम पवित्रं परमं भवान् ।

पुरुषं शाश्वतं दिव्यमादिदेवमजं विभुम् ॥१२॥

आहुस्त्वामृषयः सर्वे देवर्षिर्नारदस्तथा ।

असितो देवलो व्यासः स्वयं चैव ब्रवीषि मे ॥१३॥

(Bhagavad-Gītā 10.12–13, trans. Miller, 1986).



Meaning:

Arjuna said, “You are the Supreme Lord, the supreme abode, the supreme purifier and the supreme truth. You are the eternal, divine, original person, unborn and the greatest. Sages such as Narada, Asita, Devala and Vyasa confirm this truth about you, and now you yourself are clearly telling me the same.” In this verse, Arjuna is not only praising Krishna but also *confirming* what he has heard from earlier sages and from Krishna himself, the shloka shows Shruti in action, where divine truth becomes firmly established through a chain of authoritative voices that Arjuna hears, accepts, and internalizes as unquestionable knowledge.

अनेकवक्त्रनयनमनेकाद्भुतदर्शनम् ।

अनेकदिव्याभरणं दिव्यानेकोद्यतायुधम् ॥१०॥

दिव्यमाल्याम्बरधरं दिव्यगन्धानुलेपनम् ।

सर्वाश्चर्यमयं देवमनन्तं विश्वतोमुखम् ॥११॥

(Bhagavad-Gītā, trans. Miller, 1986)

Meaning:

Arjuna saw in that universal form countless mouths, countless eyes, and countless wondrous visions. It was adorned with many divine ornaments and held many divine weapons. It wore celestial garlands and garments, and was anointed with many heavenly fragrances. Everything about it was marvelous, radiant, boundless, and all-pervading.

These are few examples which shows that how shri Krishna resolved Arjun’s dilemma in the battlefield of Kurukshetra through spoken instruction. The entire Bhagavad Gita is structured as a dialogue where doubts, questions and answers are carried purely by hearing. It is Shruti-style pedagogy placed in a dramatic war context.

Not just in the battlefield of Kurukshetra shri Krishna gave clarity to Arjun but also same thing was happening Hstinapur where Raja Dhritrashtra was receiving every single update of the battle field through



Sanjay's mighty vision through which he told each and every moment of the battlefield without any contamination and mistake, these shloakas showcase this fact properly

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥१॥

(Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma Parva 6.1.1, trans. Ganguli, 1883–1896/2005–2010).

Meaning:

Dhritarashtra said: “O Sanjaya, what did my sons and the sons of Pandu do, after assembling on the holy field of Kurukshetra, eager for battle?”

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।

आचार्यमुपसङ्गम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥२॥

(Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma Parva 6.1.2, trans. Ganguli, 1883–1896/2005–2010).

Meaning:

Sanjaya said: “O King, seeing the army of the sons of Pandu drawn up in military formation, King Duryodhana went to his teacher and spoke these words.”

अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तीपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः ।

नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥३६॥

काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः ।

धृष्टद्युम्नो विराटश्च सात्यकिश्चापराजितः ॥३७॥

द्रुपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते ।

सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्खान्दध्मुः पृथक्पृथक् ॥३८॥



(Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma Parva 6.1.16–18, trans. Ganguli, 1883–1896/2005–2010).

Meaning:

“O King, King Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, blew his conch named Anantavijaya. Nakula and Sahadeva blew their conches called Sughosha and Manipushpaka. The great archer, the King of Kashi; the mighty warrior Shikhandi; Dhrishtadyumna; Virata; the unconquerable Satyaki; Drupada; the sons of Draupadi; and the mighty-armed son of Subhadra—all of them blew their respective conches.”

These shloaks show that how Sanjaya gave the running commentary of the battlefield to the blind king Dhritrashtra. Sanjaya sees and speaks; Dhritrashtra only hears and understands. This is again a powerful example of Shruti Parampara—knowledge of events and dharma being carried accurately through pure listening, without visual confirmation or written record.

These are the few shloaks among the set of verses present in the Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. There is one more prominent example of Shruti Parampara in this epic which is the writing of this epic, in which Maharishi Ved Vyas himself recited the whole story of this epic to Bhagwan Ganesha so that it can be converted to smriti and the knowledge of this epic can be transferred to generations. This particular example itself gives the strongest proof that Mahabharata is the greatest example of the Shruti Parampara, at the very moment when it becomes a written text, it still depends entirely on oral recitation from guru (Vyasa) to listener-scribe (Ganesha). (Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Sukthankar et al., 1933–1966).

Thus, from Krishna–Arjuna dialogue, to Sanjaya–Dhritrashtra narration, to Vyasa–Ganesha composition, Mahabharata consistently embodies the Shruti method of communication: listening, memorisation, error-free recitation, and faithful transmission.



Conclusion

All these examples, whether it be the samwad between Arjun and shri Krishna where shri Krishna is resolving the dilemmas of Arjun which he was getting during the war time but shri Krishna resolved the dilemmas with his updeshas which are the prominent example of shruti Parampara because here shri Krishna used smriti to transfer his knowledge to Arjuna. (Bhagavad-Gītā, trans. Prabhupāda, 2008) Same goes in the case of Dhritrashtra who was the blind king of the Hastinapur samrajya who was getting the running commentary from Sanjay who got boon of mighty vision through which he was able to see what actually is happening in the battle field of Kurukshetra, so he gave the running commentary of the war to Dhritrashtra with full precision and without any distortion, (Mahābhārata, trans. Ganguli, 1883–1896/2005–2010) or coming to Maharishi Ved Vyas’s recitation of the whole Shreemad Bhagwat katha to Bhagwan Ganesh without any distortion and error are prominent and accurate example of Shruti Parampara operating inside the epic.

Yet there are many more examples in the epic which states the fact that Mahabharata is the Greatest example of the Shruti Parampara. For now these examples provide enough evidence to prove the point of this paper, that Mahabharata, though formally a Smriti text, functions as a “people’s Shruti”, taking the core principles of Shruti transmission—hearing, memory, lineage, and disciplined recitation—and applying them to narrative, ethics, and everyday dharma. Hereby this study states that Mahabharata is the greatest example of the Shruti Parampara.

In a time when people depend on digital devices for memory and suffer from short attention spans, Mahabharata as the greatest expression of Shruti Parampara offers a deeply rooted model for deep listening, value-based education, and meaningful communication. It reminds modern education and media that true knowledge is not only what is stored in devices or books, but what is carefully heard, remembered, and lived through relationships like that of guru and shishya, Krishna and Arjuna, Vyasa and Ganesha, and even Sanjaya and Dhritrashtra



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