

# HERMENEUTICS AND NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

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A close-reading of the initial and concluding books of the *Mahābhārata* reveals a sophisticated and carefully-composed text. The *Mahābhārata* contains two versions of Uṭṭaṅka's biography: one in the *Ādiparvan* (1.3.86-1.3.195) and the other in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* (14.52.1-14.57.56). In spite of their apparent duplication, the Poona Critical Edition retains both versions. Multiple versions and divergent accounts have traditionally been interpreted as indications that the core-narrative underwent a process of accretion. The twin Uṭṭaṅka-narratives, however, reveal a sophisticated narratological architecture that exceeds the boundaries of straight-forward story-telling.

In my presentation, I demonstrate that the twin narratives are not the result of a process of inchoate expansion, as Wilhelm suggests in his *Prüfung und Initiation im Buche Pausya und in der Biographie des Naropa* (Wiesbaden, 1965). Rather, they indicate at the redactorial effort that went into the creation of this text. I will show that the two narratives were integrated according to a rigorous logic and that, together, they articulate a consistent hermeneutic, pedagogical, and philosophical project.

Moreover, the *Mahābhārata* makes clever use of two narratological levels, the one represented by Vyāsa, who, I argue, represents the author-father, and the other by Uṭṭaṅka, who is the student-interpreter. By focusing on the person of Uṭṭaṅka, we can unravel this meta-level or meta-text, which intersects, often playfully, with the underlying narrative. I believe the puzzle of the *Mahābhārata*'s textual structure can be solved, at least partially, by distinguishing between these two levels of narration and interpretation.