

Threads of The Mahābhārata

UNSW Library Special Collections houses a collection of 150 handbound volumes of the epic Indian poem *The Mahābhārata*, translated verse-by-verse from Sanskrit to English by P. Lāl. The preface of each copy refers to P. Lāl as the *transcreator*, acknowledging the inherent creativity of this ambitious undertaking.

P. Lāl (1929–2010) was a celebrated poet, essayist, professor, and publisher. The task of single-handedly translating *The Mahābhārata* spanned a period of 42 years (1968–2010), becoming Lāl's life's work.

Each book is beautifully handbound with handloomed sari cloth in a variety of textures, patterns, and colours. The map-litho paper is made in India, with the text handset on an Indian-made, hand-operated machine in Kolkata.

The Mahābhārata

Volumes 1-150, 1968-1996

Transcreated from the Sanskrit of Vyāsa by P. Lāl

Printed in Kolkata, India, by Writers Workshop

V294.5923/3 (1-150)



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The Mahābhārata is a revered epic of ancient India and is largely considered the longest poem ever written. With over 100,000 slokas (verses), *The Mahābhārata* contains a wealth of mythology, religion, philosophy, ethics, customs, and information about clans, kings, and sages. Scholars believe the epic was composed over many generations, with the definitive version compiled in Sanskrit around 200 C.E. by the Indian sage Vyāsa.

It narrates an epic war between two groups of royal cousins, which is broadly allegorical of the eternal struggle between good and evil. The tale involves humans and mythical God-like figures who use divine trickery to intervene in worldly outcomes. Contained within *The Mahābhārata* is the popular Bhagavad Gita (“Lord’s Song”), a spiritual text whose influence has moved well beyond Hinduism and the Indian subcontinent.

The Mahābhārata reveals the evolution of Hinduism alongside religions such as Jainism, Vaishnavism, and Buddhism. It is considered the most comprehensive exposition of dharma (code of conduct or duty), a moral concept common to many Eastern philosophies and religions. Despite its age, *The Mahābhārata* is still an often quoted and cherished classic.

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