

**Homer's The Iliad as an epic.**

**Or,**

**Discuss the epic features of The Iliad what Characteristics of an epic do you find in Homer's Iliad?**

**Ans- The Iliad is a primary epic. It was originally composed orally and after centuries of oral transmission it was finally written down. In all orally composed epic poems, we have certain features in common. First of all, they are partly based on some historical events. The Iliad deals with the Trojan War that was a historical event. Ithaca Mycenae, the countries of Odysseus and Agamemnon were states in the historical times in Greece. Other features of an epic lie in its exalted narrative style, its unity of action, rapidity, the art of beginning, the use of the supernatural, the ornamental simple, the recurrent epithet etc. The Iliad accommodates all these features.**

**An epic is a long narrative poem and The Iliad upholds this quality. The Iliad was originally composed in Greek language and was translated widely by various other languages including English. The original Greek version consists approximately of 15,700 lines and is divided into twenty four books (Chapters), each describing the tales of the battles and events of Trojan War of a few weeks in the final year.**

**The opening of an epic is usually an invocation to some supernatural power or gods and goddesses. The Iliad then begins with such an invocation. The poet seeks the help of a muse/goddess so that he can successfully narrate this story. The first line of the Iliad as everyone remembers is: The wrath, sing goddess, of Peleus son Achilles.**

**A primary epic is originally composed to/be sung or recited to music. The first line of The Iliad shows this intention of oral nature. In an epic, and particularly in a primary epic, there are supernatural agents who are involved in human affairs. In The Iliad we find a significant number of gods and goddesses influencing human affairs. Gods and goddesses even have their human offspring Achilles, for example, is the son of Thetis, the sea nymph. The very cause of Trojan War as The Iliad narrates was the cause of Aphrodite's involvement with Paris, the Trojan prince. Gods and goddesses even quarrel and fight among themselves about human affairs. They often appear to their favourites in human shapes. The presence of such supernatural agencies in The Iliad is one of the striking features of its epic nature. The epic story usually is not a common story of day-to-day affairs. It has some national or international significance. Thus the war between the Trojans and the Greeks (Achaean) was a matter of existence of glory or fall. The Iliad does not end with the fall of Troy, but obviously the story indicates that Troy must fall. Thus based on the magnitude or the significance of the tales, we can categorize The Iliad as an epic. Apart from this aspect, a primary epic is generated by periods of upheaval, of struggle and adventure. The narration of Trojan War is a clear indication of this upheaval or adventure**

**An epic poem usually has an epic hero who possesses immense stature and strength. In fact, epic**

*heroes are larger than life demigods (descendants of deities) or heroes. In The Iliad, Achilles exhibits godlike qualities that are more than human. Hector, another hero is almost parallel to Achilles. As usual, both in primary and secondary epics, single combat is a common plot device. Thus Achilles and Hector face each other in mortal combat. They use mortal weapons like shields, spears etc, that are also epic elements. An epic whether primary or secondary has a distinctive narrative style such as the use of elevated languages which are revealed through the use of various kinds of figures of speech like similes metaphors, stock phrases, epithets or repetitions etc. The Iliad abounds with such figures of speech. Epithets like soft-footed Achilles "ox-eyed Heracles" "Cloud-gathering" Zeus are common. In the original (Greek version) about one third of the lines are repeated wholly or in part.*

*Homeric simile is one of the important features of an epic simile. An epic simile is a detailed comparison in the form of a simile that is many lines in length. This kind of simile known as Homeric simile has been used by many English poets, most famously by John Milton. The typical Homeric simile makes a comparison to some kind of event in the form "like a - when it -". For instance, Aias is compared to a storm cloud:*

*"As when a goat herd looks out from a watch tower of a hill over the sea, and sees a cloud coming afar off over the sea carrying with it much tempest, so appeared the March of the Greek warriors".*

*In conclusion we can say that The Iliad possesses characteristic features of an epic poem. It is composed in a grand style. It includes an epic hero, supernatural machinery, war (Trojan war) great issues like honour and dignity, the great significance of national interest etc. So we can call Iliad an epic or a primary epic.*