

# Paradox of Wars in Indian Writings: Traversing The Unintended Path to Peace

**Dr Alka Dutt**

**Assistant Professor, Affiliation: Amity University, Haryana**

## Abstract

This paper is an exploration as to why wars become significant and important through historical journey to present times. Events that happened in the deepest of deep pasts continue to fascinate and attract humanity from around the globe. Continuous interpretations and re interpretations of the great Epics and other revered Indian texts have helped in preserving both the religious and cultural identity of not only the great Indian Sub Continent but the whole region that comes under South Asia. Wars under discussion are more than physical confrontations. Be it cosmic or human warfare, it serves to emphasize upon the inter connectedness that exists between the material realm and the spiritual one. Wars have cathartic effect on individuals. Examples of this can be seen in literary texts, historical texts and those penned down by great philosophers. These transformative events bring psychological release for individuals. There is emotional purification both at individual and collective level of societies. Aristotle says that, “Tragedy is an imitation of a serious and complete action, having magnitude, which through pity and fear bring about a catharsis of such emotions”. Catharsis comes with different explanations. The events arousing ‘cathartic’ effect mean that they are fully clarified for their role as being essential and with universal significance. The narrators of tragic events are probably meant to make readers move from particular to the general by making ‘reader spectator’ come face to face with what is known as the ‘universal law’.

**Keywords:** Narrative, Epic, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Karma, Law, Morals

## Introduction

Indian philosophy talks about pre-determined destiny that follows causal **law** of the universe as the determiner that takes into account good and bad **karmas** of previous births for his future life cycles. Gold mine of Indian writings, be it Veda, Puranas, Upanishads, Samhitas or stories like those from Jataka tales; one is invited by authors of these tales to believe in previous lives that in turn can lead to cultivation of talent like that of great Rishis who remembered their previous births and through their enlightened minds went on to add on to their existing morals. Texts under consideration talk about one’s duty, **morals**, justice and one’s actions. Mahabharata by Rishi Vyasa is avidly read for its relevance to history, its spiritual nature and psychological guidance. While **Mahabharata** story is rid with complexities of family structure, hierarchies and roles of different varnas in Vedic society, **Ramayana** comes with major war taking place

between seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu and Ravana, demon king of Lanka. Third text under consideration deals with cosmic wars that took place between the Devi and unrighteousness forces, the Asuras.

## Literary Review

### **Mahabharata: More than a historical record**

The **Epic** explores events of the ancient war of succession and what transpires after the great Kurukshetra war fought between Kauravas and Pandavas. Also known as the fifth Veda, the great **epic** poem comprises of 100,000 sloka. The book comes as ‘frame-tales’ story structure that does not make it a work to be taken as a holy scripture; albeit it is the *Bhagavad Gita* or the ‘*Song of the Lord*’ which is considered as the holiest of the holy **narratives** within the larger **narrative**.

The story of Pandavas is taken up from their birth, followed by childhood days, their education, marriages and struggles due to constant nagging by their cousins, Kauravas. Narrative is about human suffering under cruel power that is blind to conspiracies. It is tale of humiliation suffered at times by one’s own actions. It talks about fall of man and his realization that helps him in recovering all that is lost. The **epic** on dharmayuddha illustrates standards of warfare that need to be followed for fair outcomes. But, **Mahabharata** is all about broken rules. Multiple soldiers were not supposed to attack a single person, Abhimanyu was slain in the formation of Chakravayuh. Karna was attacked when unarmed, a rule was flouted. When Bhima fought with Duryodhana, he went against the rules of gadda-yuddha or mace warfare and dealt mortal blow on his opponent’s thigh. The massive work is divided into 18 parts and each part comes with its own particular theme to it. Harivamsa Parva, also known as *The Book of Genealogy of Hari*, is an add on to the Epic.

The **Epic** is an insight into lives of people and their ideologies. One can take it to be a guide in understanding one’s duty in adverse circumstances towards maintaining peace and harmony in one’s society as well as in the universe. Krishna’s conversation with Arjuna comes to us as *Bhagavad Gita*. ‘Gita’ inspires man to face **moral** ambiguities in life to perform their duties.

Family Saga is intricate portrayal of strengths and weaknesses attributed to normal human beings. Heroes of war deeply flawed, yet one does not take them to be write offs as they are multi-dimensional and relatable. The tale is about human emotions and how men are driven to doom due to their dark natures.

The physical war at Kurukshetra stands out for that of being war of good against evil forces. It is war of individuals internal battles. It teaches one to attain peace within by overcoming all desires and worldly attachments.

A profound spiritual text, the **Epic** poem warns all against wars. Though won, these cost irreparable losses like those faced by Pandavas even with Krishna by their side. Yudhishtira was considered to be a virtuous ruler. He becomes king of Hastinapur; a kingdom that is now without most of his family members and great warriors. One learns from his suffering that earthly destinations though attained, are not without suffering and one should develop in oneself power of resilience along with perseverance to defeat all odds.

### Different concepts of duty and conflict in Ramayana

Ideal son, ideal husband, ideal brother and ideal ruler, Rama the Maryada Purushottam, seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is attributed with all these titles. He is pushed into impoverished lifestyle by his step mother, Kaikeyi. Rama being an avatar, knows his dharma and purpose of his existence on Earth. He wages numerous wars against demons during the exile. He recites the following on the shores of mighty empire of Lanka:

*“Uncanny visions arise in my mind:  
Of timeless evil, and a battle older than the earth,  
Which has been fought before on countless worlds, in forgotten ages.  
Even after this battle of Lanka, the war shall be fought again and again;  
Until time ends, and dharma and a dharma with it.”*

Stories of Rama vary from one region to another, thereby reflecting upon local preoccupations. But, the main story remains the same. Theme of good vs evil and ultimate victory of truth resounds in **Ramayana**. Rama came before Krishna; Rama in Treta Yuga and Krishna in Dwapar Yuga. Rama is upholder of Dharma who incorporates within him all that is to be seen in a divine human and a mortal god. Krishna is associated with action and Rama with “reasoning and emotions”. Rama adheres to codes set up by society. He undergoes personal hardships and sufferings while adhering to his **moral** ethics. He follows dharma in obedient manner. Multifaceted Krishna is loving son, adorable lover and divine guide. He is a politician, a strategist according to need of his times. But, he is the great Philosopher who guides this world till date. He is clever and does not hesitate in moving beyond conventional **moral** demands. He has deceptive traits of finest kind for attaining higher purposes. While Rama suffers, Krishna teaches how to come out of suffering. He makes man go through self-realization and ultimate liberation. Though directly blamed to be the person behind the Great War by Gandhari, mother of Duryodhana, Krishna is to be revered for his emphasis on Bhakti, and for showing way to fulfillment of one’s cosmic duty that goes beyond any societal rules.

For the protagonist of Ramayana, **Karma** is all about right actions as per one’s position in society. Rama adheres to his duties and **moral** responsibilities. Rama is serious and disciplined in nature while Krishna is mischievous and prone to using unorthodox methods while solving major problems. While Rama believes that good karmas will bear good fruits for the individual, society and the universe, Krishna advocates that one should do his duty but with detachment from fruits of his actions. According to Krishna, one should align one’s duty with cosmic order. Actions of Rama are straightforward and unambiguous; Krishna does away with traditional dharma and appears morally ambiguous in his actions during many instances. Rama had to answer Bali for killing him from behind a tree, but Krishna guides Pandavas through many hazardous turns without giving too many explanations. Without Krishna’s navigation, Pandavas would never have won the war. Draupadi asks Krishna, why didn’t he stop the war as he was the lord incarnate. Krishna says he could not do so as he was bound from all sides by oaths and promises of one family member to the other, and this did not allow for his intervention.

War between Rama and demon King Ravana is shown to be of personal nature. In simple words, Rama

fights Ravana to get back his abducted wife, Sita. But when seen from another angle, the story comes with cosmic dimension. Ravana and most of his followers are unethical. Rakshasas had become strong through unethical religious practices. Ravana himself had acquired many boons from Shiva and was invincible and proud of it. He was a learned Brahmin with immense knowledge. His lifestyle and his actions are those of an evil person. Rama's journey as a protector of sages had begun much earlier than his tiff with Ravana. Sage Vishwamitra appealed to King of Ayodhya to lend him Rama to save Yajnas from being destroyed by demons.

Rama killed Maricha and Subahu, along with their mother Tadka. He rid the earth of man eaters like Khara and Dushana. They were directly linked to Ravana. Son of Khara, Makaraksha met his fate at the hands of Rama. Mighty clan of Ravana lost to Rama's army. Ravana lost Kumbhakarna, his brother, Kabandha, Varadha, Trishira, Meghanada, Atikaya, Akshayakumara, Narantaka, Devantaka, Prahasta and other valorous warriors. Rule of Ravana and unrighteousness ended with death of Ravana.

Krishna killed many rakshasa while still in his cradle, his journey through life is something totally unlike that of any other avatar of the Preserver. Krishna went through traumatic times, he was blamed time and again for things he had not done, he learnt at early stage that evil should be eradicated without a thought for its prescience as a family member. He killed his own uncle and freed his parents. Rama was a family man, his wars were fought outside his country. Krishna had to take difficult and advice similarly those under his guidance. Mahabharata was fought due to greed in people, greed for throne, riches, women, jealousy and ambition. Antagonists are not defined in Mahabharata, but in **Ramayana** there are clear cut definitions People talk about golden rule of Rajarama, but Mahabharata cannot give its readers a positive ending as it was fought on mass scale and cost loss of life and property in millions. Divine justice can be identified in Ramayana but it goes missing in Mahabharata. For the victorious of Mahabharata, awaits grief and guilt. Mahabharata emphasizes on the futility of wars with their heavy burdens of consequences.

### **Devi as Preserver and Protector of Cosmic Order**

The Supreme Mother is independent power that maintains cosmic balance. She is the dynamic, creative force that energies the form of Devi on Earth. Devi as wife of Shiva, complements her consort with her presence. Shiva is complete with Shakti by his side. Most stories related to Devi are connected with her appearance on Earth as Sati. Her avatars are there to reinstate order in the world. *Durga Saptasati* eulogies the goddess with its seven hundred shlokas. She is depicted as fierce force that is cruel to evil asuras. She is violent and destructive for evil entities. She frees the world of demons like Mahishasura, Chanda, Munda, Shumbha, Nishumbha and Raktabija. She restores peace to the Earth.

Both Devas and Asuras aspire for boons from the divine form. Rama too prayed to Durga before going to war.

Krishna too prayed to the divine mother. Indian mythology comes with not one Devi, but there are manifestations who come to aid the devotees in different forms. Kansa was ego and Krishna stood for bliss in the form of Krishna. Daughter born to Yashoda is worshipped as Devi Vindhyavasini. Kansa tried to destroy her but she with the power of eternal primordial divine consciousness, slipped from his hands and

predicted his death at hands of Krishna. She is also worshipped as Yogmaya, with power of Lord Vishnu who saves Krishna on the Earth. This was already pre planned by Krishna before he incarnated on Earth. The virtuous form of woman, Devi Sita is worshipped for her service to her lord. She compliments dutiful Rama by being his loving wife who walks behind him. Radha is Krishna's eternal consort, his lover and Guru. She is as naughty and playful as Lord Krishna.

Purest forms of energy seem to take one form or another and worshipped as Devi's in the this world. They come with something extraordinary that is beyond a normal female form. Pratha of Kanya Pujan in India during Navratri is ones acceptance of female energy that though invisible, can be anywhere to protect her devotees.

### Conclusion

Battles of Devi stand for cosmic wars. But wars of Mahabharata and Ramayana are taken to be human wars. Ancient wars were fought for personal reasons. Small armies fought local battles to preserve honour, show their valour and settle territorial disputes. But modern warfare is dangerous with its advanced technology and threat of large-scale destruction, and to say the least it is threat to very existence to life on this planet. There are no war fields in today's world where nuclear weapons can be used from anywhere with devastating consequences. Politically driven wars, wars fueled by economic factors, cannot come with sympathy or empathy for peace loving people.

One does not deny existence of God. But path of devout is not strewn with flowers as flowers do come with thorns. How the lord works to preserve the creation, is known to the lord alone. He works in invisible manner and man should not expect perfection, beauty and pleasure in all things by merely chanting his name, nor should miracles be expected day after day for man continues to create his obstacles life after life and God continues to support him in breaking the inner and outer obstacles in his each life. God is there to ensure effective workings of Karma within a given framework. He never interferes with anybody's Karma. God offers guidance when sought for. He offers spiritual salvation by showing the right path. Here is true healing that does not allow for deep scars of warfares to mar human psyche.

### References:

1. Aristotle's concept of catharsis. <https://haaconline.org.in/attendance/classnotes/files/1627756243.pdf>
2. Olivelle Patrick. Karma Indian Philosophy. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/karma>
3. Dharma-Yuddha. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma-yuddha>
4. Mahabharata. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata>
5. Unknown Facts about the Ramayana. <https://www.artofliving.org/in-en/culture/reads/the-facts-about-ram>
6. Lord Krishna's Devi Worsjip and It's Significamce. [https://wisdom.srisriravishankar.org/lord-krishnas-devi-worship-significance/#:~:text=Lord%20Kris hna%20used%20to%20worship,%2C%20from%20the%20Markandeya%20Purana\).](https://wisdom.srisriravishankar.org/lord-krishnas-devi-worship-significance/#:~:text=Lord%20Kris hna%20used%20to%20worship,%2C%20from%20the%20Markandeya%20Purana).)
7. Devi Mahatmya.

<https://devimahatmya.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DEVI-MAHATMYA-FULL.pdf>

8. Shri Mahaprabhu Chaitanya Gaudiya Math. Bhakti Prasad.  
<https://bhaktiprasad.in/download-bhagwat-geeta-pdf/>
9. Shrimad Valmiki Ramayana.  
<https://archive.org/details/shrimad-valmiki-ramayana-hindi-edition-valmiki>
10. Rajagopalachari. Mahabharata Retold.  
[https://www.hariomgroup.org/hariombooks\\_sshastra/mahabharata.pdf](https://www.hariomgroup.org/hariombooks_sshastra/mahabharata.pdf)