



JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL LAUREATES ACADEMY

www.rlaindia.org

THE HINDU THEORY OF JUST WAR AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE TO GLOBAL PEACE

Tarak Biswas

Research Scholar, Political Science, Munger University, Bihar

ABSTRACT

One of the main concerns of many philosophical and religious traditions has been the ethical assessment of war. The idea of "Just War" refers to moral standards that establish the appropriate timing and manner of war. Hinduism emphasizes justice, righteousness, and societal protection in its approach to war, which is based on dharma (moral obligation and cosmic order). The Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the political treatise like Manusmriti and Arthashastra are among the classic Hindu texts that offer ethical frameworks for warfare. By examining historical interpretations, philosophical doctrines, and scriptural teachings, this research paper investigates the Hindu viewpoint on just war. Hinduism does not advocate violence, according to the study, but it does accept war as a moral obligation when it is required to uphold justice, dharma, and society.

Keywords: Hinduism, Just War, Dharma-Yuddha, Ethics of War, Ahimsa,

INTRODUCTION

The history of just war theory dates back hundreds of years, when Christian scholars such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine maintained that the right reason to go to war (jus ad bellum) must be the restoration of peace and order, not the humiliation of the defeated, and that war should always be waged with an attitude of sorrow rather than retaliation. Later, Aquinas organized these jus and bellum ideas into three fundamental conditions: right intention, just cause, and legitimate authority. These discussions have been carried on by contemporary Christian ethicists. For instance, Jean Bethke Elshtain contended that political responsibility in a broken world occasionally necessitates using force to protect the defenseless. Stanley Hauerwas, on the other hand, maintained that a witness of nonviolence at all costs is necessary for Christian discipleship.

Conceptual Foundations of Hindu just War Thought

Hinduism is often referred to as one of the world's "oldest living religions," but in fact it's much more than just a 'religion' in the sense that people in the West are usually taught to think of the concept. With over a billion adherents worldwide, 'Hindu' is a broad umbrella term which covers an incredibly rich tapestry of belief systems, practices, rituals, philosophies, and cultural expressions. It is both deeply personal and vastly global, embracing a diversity of interpretations and expressions that defy rigid definitions—some Hindus embrace Hinduism as a religious practice, with a clearly-defined set of doctrines and scriptures, while for others Hinduism is more of a philosophical outlook or way of life.

Like the Bible for Christians or the Quran for Muslims, there isn't a single, infallible sacred text in Hinduism. As an alternative, there are multiple text collections. The Vedas possess the most extensive authority and are the oldest sacred texts in Hinduism. It is thought that they were composed between 1800 and 1200 BCE. the Upanishads offer a more philosophical and theoretical perspective on Hinduism. One of the most well-known parts of the world's longest epic poem, the Mahabharata, is the Bhagavad-Gita, which is arguably the most well-known and frequently cited work in all of Hinduism. The Ramayana is the other most significant epic poem in Hinduism.

In Hindu warfare, both moral values and courage are valued. The fact that books on ancient Indian politics were referred to as Ntisastra indicates that, despite their secular content, they had

a religious foundation. Religion actually controlled every individual's life from birth to death. Therefore, it became clear that the institution was reduced to animal ferocity when war was waged without consideration for moral principles. The ethical code and the code of the lawgivers, who wrote the Dharmasutras and Dharmasastras, were thus established. The two types of warfare recognized by Hindu military science are the dharmayuddha and the kutayuddha. Mantra-yuddha and Prakasayuddha are two additional categories. The concept of Dharmayuddha refers to war waged in accordance with dharma, in this case the Ksatradharma, or the law of Kings and Warriors. Stated differently, society approved of the war because it was just and moral. It was also known as open battle, or prakasayuddha. There was no room for secrecy. The parties to the conflict agreed on the preliminary terms of the conflict before the actual conflict started. Strategy and artifice were not used in this war's operations. After that, it was both a straight fight and a controlled fight. At the same time, the Kutayuddha was an unjust war. A cunning battle was waged in secret. At times, the use of charms, spells, and mantras had an impact. The term mantra-yuddha was occasionally used, and it was only acceptable as a last resort and only for defensive purposes.

Now let's look at the laws that govern just or righteous warfare. When an emperor decided to attack another empire he would send an ambassador with the message either fight or submit. 5000 years ago ancient Hinduism contributed greatly to the advancement of international law in this way.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the philosophical underpinnings of the Hindu concept of just war.
2. To investigate the moral principles that regulate warfare according to Hindu texts.
3. To examine the ideas of Dharma Yuddha and Ahimsa as they pertain to warfare. To contrast Hindu just war principles with modern humanitarian standards.
4. To assess the significance of Hindu war ethics in fostering global peace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is qualitative and analytical, with a focus on textual and interpretive analysis. Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Manusmriti, Shukra Niti, and Arthashastra are examples of primary sources. Scholarly books,

journal articles, and contemporary interpretations of Hindu political and ethical philosophy are examples of secondary sources.

By comparing Hindu just war principles with contemporary international humanitarian law—including ideas found in the Geneva Conventions and current ethical discussions on warfare—the study also uses a comparative method.

Ramayana and the Ideal of Moral Warfare

There is also an example of righteous warfare in the Ramayana. In order to save his wife and bring about justice, the hero Rama battles the demon king Ravana in this epic tale. It is said that Rama's conflict with Ravana is a moral conflict between right and wrong. Rama fights for the defense of righteousness rather than his own ambition. Rama shows his enemy respect and compassion even during the battle. Following Ravana's passing, Rama makes sure the deceased king is given the appropriate funeral rites, demonstrating the moral behavior expected even in triumph.

Manusmriti and Humanitarian Principles

The Manusmriti makes it clear that the first step in preventing war is to engage in talks and reconciliation. Leaders could only use armed conflict as a last resort after diplomatic attempts failed. A sophisticated understanding that war should always be the last option is demonstrated by this hierarchy of conflict resolution, which prioritizes peaceful methods over violence. Clearly defined boundaries were established by the Manusmriti when war became inevitable. It was against the rules for soldiers to hurt non-combatants, civilians, or surrendered individuals. Force had to be used proportionately to the danger being faced. Attacking people who were unprepared, sleeping, or had misplaced their weapons was forbidden in the text. Manu's code defined protected persons as travelers who were not taking part in the conflict, those who were eating or drinking, people going about their regular business, diplomatic envoys, and Brahmins unless they were actively involved in combat. These clauses are directly comparable to those found in contemporary Geneva Conventions, especially when it comes to protecting civilians.

Bhagvat Gita and the Ethics of War

The Bhagavad Gita, a 700-verse exchange between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna, is arguably the most well-known part of the Mahabharata. This discussion about Arjuna's moral dilemma about fighting against his own family and teachers takes place on the battlefield shortly before the start of the conflict. The Gita discusses the conflict between the obligation to preserve morality and the ideal of non-violence rather than merely endorsing war. The emphasis of Krishna's advice to Arjuna is on detached action, or carrying out one's obligations without regard to the results and without hatred, rage, or retaliation. According to this philosophy, warriors should remain composed and compassionate even in situations where using violence is required. Crucially, the Gita promotes non-violence as a fundamental virtue while simultaneously defending justifiable warfare. The book encourages moderation and makes the argument that using violence in the absence of such moderation is against warrior ethics.

The Mahabharata and the Rules of Ethical Warfare

Hindu texts limited the conduct of warfare in addition to dictating who could be targeted. The Mahabharata advised against the use of weapons that are needlessly cruel, such as poisoned arrows, barbed projectiles, and other tools intended to inflict undue suffering. Most significantly, the epic forbade the use of supernatural weapons—weapons of mass destruction—against regular soldiers. These celestial weapons were thought to be so potent that they could destroy the entire universe if they were used. These weapons should only be used in the direst situations and never against weaker opponents, warriors were repeatedly warned.

Kautilya's Arthashastra and Political Realism

Even though Kautilya's Arthashastra is frequently regarded as having a more practical approach to statecraft, it also placed a strong emphasis on treating defeated peoples and their princes with kindness. In order to guarantee enduring peace, even this realpolitik text advocated for civilian security and equitable administration of conquered lands.

One of the most unique aspects of Dharma Yuddha is its emphasis on equality and proportionality in combat. Only warriors with the same weapons and mounted on the same

kind of vehicle were supposed to engage in combat; chariot warriors were not supposed to attack infantry, and elephant riders weren't supposed to confront foot soldiers. This idea persisted during the entire conflict. Ethical fighters were supposed to stop and wait for repairs if an opponent's weapon broke or their chariot wheel became stuck before continuing the fight. In the Mahabharata, the killing of young Abhimanyu is condemned for being killed by six warriors while fighting by himself.

Sukra Niti and Ethical Kingship

Shukracharya is often viewed as a knowledgeable mentor and political philosopher in ancient Indian literature. His text, Shukra Niti, offers advice to rulers regarding governance, diplomacy, justice, and military tactics. In this work, warfare is not perceived as the initial choice; instead, it is regarded as a final measure to safeguard justice, order, and the state.

According to Shukra Niti, there are some circumstances in which war is justified. For example, a king may go to war to protect his people, territory, and sovereignty from an aggressor. If war is waged to preserve morality and justice, it is regarded as justifiable. War may be used to restore moral governance if a ruler starts to act oppressively or unfairly. When friendly states are unfairly attacked, a righteous king should defend them. These values demonstrate that Shukra opposed expansionist or aggressive war without a valid reason.

According to Shukracharya's political theory, war ought to be avoided until all other options have been exhausted. The king ought to try diplomacy first. The six diplomatic policies of Shadgunya (peace, war, neutrality, alliance, preparation, and dual policy) are reflected in this. Before choosing to go to war, peaceful talks, treaties, and alliances are encouraged

According to the guidelines established by Shukra, soldiers must fight with discipline and honor. People who are unarmed, civilians, or non-combatants shouldn't be hurt. Agricultural lands, temples, and other places of worship ought to be safeguarded. Humane treatment of prisoners of war is required. Like later concepts in just war theory, these regulations show a strong concern for humanitarian values in combat.

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya believed that when war was required to defend the kingdom, uphold law and order, or increase power, it was a legitimate tool of state policy. War was

justified when it contributed to the security and prosperity of the state, not when it was encouraged for its own sake. Protecting his subjects and maintaining political stability were the responsibilities of a ruler (king). Therefore, if war protected the state and maintained dharma (righteous order), it could be ethically justified.

Kautilya classified war into various categories based on the strategy and circumstances. This type of warfare adhered to specific moral and tactical standards. The term "Concealed War" (Kuta Yuddha) refers to indirect warfare that uses strategies like deception, espionage, psychological warfare, and ambush. Assassination is one of the covert tactics used in the Silent War (Tushnim Yuddha).

Kautilya thought that in some situations, such as self-defense war might be justified.

Like for the preservation of territory and sovereignty, power expansion when it improves the state's stability. The monarch must carefully consider whether war will increase the kingdom's security.

Despite his practical approach, Kautilya also suggested some limitations: Prevent needless devastation of economic resources and agricultural land. When feasible, defend civilians and non-combatants. Maintaining political stability requires careful treatment of conquered populations. Rather than using force destructively, use it strategically. These concepts show an early ethical perspective on governance and warfare.

Kautilya emphasized diplomacy as the first option. His famous Sixfold Policy (Shadgunya) included:

Peace(Sandhi),War(Vigraha),Neutrality,(Asana),Marching/Preparation.(Yana),Alliance (Samsraya) and Dual Policy (Dvaidhibhava).A ruler should select the strategy that best protects the kingdom's interests, using war only when peaceful options fail.

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya's political philosophy offers a practical strategy for fighting. Although not specifically referred to as "just war theory," it describes the circumstances, tactics, and moral issues surrounding the acceptable use of force. According to Kautilya, war should only be used when diplomacy has failed and should serve the state's protection and prosperity. His theories make a significant contribution to early political and strategic thinking by fusing realism with ethical responsibility.

Contemporary Relevance to Global Peace

The Hindu view of just war is still pertinent in today's ethical and international relations debates. Complex issues pertaining to international security, humanitarian protection, and military intervention are frequently present in contemporary conflicts. Hindu ethical teachings highlight a number of ideas that can be relevant to current discussions:

1. Only just causes should be used to wage war.
2. The use of force ought to be reserved for extreme circumstances.
3. Moral responsibility is a must for leaders. Non-combatants and civilians need to be safeguarded.
4. The restoration of peace ought to be the ultimate objective of war.

These ideas are very similar to contemporary international laws that regulate armed conflict, such as humanitarian law and the moral standards of warfare.

CONCLUSION

The Hindu view of just war offers a complex moral framework based on the ideas of dharma, ahimsa, and svadharma. While acknowledging the terrible reality of war, Hindu scriptures make an effort to control it through moral precepts. The idea of Dharma Yuddha offers comprehensive rules for moral behavior in combat as well as stringent circumstances under which war may be justified. Even during times of conflict, these values place a strong emphasis on justice, moderation, and compassion. A thorough tradition of war ethics within Hindu philosophy is formed by the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, the stories of the Mahabharata, and the political insights of the Arthashastra. Despite their antiquated origins, these concepts are still pertinent in today's debates over international law, military morality, and world peace. In the end, Hindu philosophy teaches that although war may occasionally be inevitable, it must always be directed by moral responsibility and righteousness. It is not the ultimate goal.

REFERENCES

1. Basham, A. L. (1954). *The wonder that was India*. Grove Press.
2. Doniger, W. (2009). *The Hindus: An alternative history*. Oxford University Press.

3. Gandhi, M. K. (2000). *The Bhagavad Gita according to Gandhi*. North Atlantic Books.
4. Johnson, J. T. (1981). *Just war tradition and the restraint of war*. Princeton University Press.
5. Kautilya. (2013). *The Arthashastra* (L. N. Rangarajan, Trans.). Penguin Classics.
6. Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *The Bhagavadgita*. Harper & Brothers.
7. Zaehner, R. C. (1969). *Hinduism*. Oxford University Press.