

**THE UNENDING RIGMAROLE OF DHARMA AND ADHARMA IN PARVA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITHIN THE TEXT -I**

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Abstract

The mythical story of Mahabharata narrated by Vyasa has been a perennial source of inspiration for writers and critics through ages. There are many works created in all Indian languages having the story of Mahabharata as its base in all forms, languages and ages. If said, Mahabharata has been one of the basic resources of the Hindu religious philosophy would be no exaggeration. The book of Mahabharata among Hindus is a sacred scripture. This story, it's bigger than life characters, their performance of deeds beyond human reach, its handling of the philosophical and religious issues and such evidences throughout engulfing the whole of human life have controlled the nerve of Indian populace for a considerably longer time. S. L. Bhyrappa's novel "Parva" written elaborately surveys and analyses the mythical whereabouts of Mahabharata from the viewpoints of Psychology and Anthropology. It is quite often said and believed about the war in Mahabharata, as the war fought as per and to safeguard the true Dharma and to establish the supremacy of Arya Dharma over Adharma. Simply, it is known as Dharmayuddha on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Believers of this myth are under the notion that the Pandavas of Kuru lineage and their supporter Krishna of Yadava clan ably shouldered the responsibility to establish and safeguard the true Arya Dharma of their ancestors. Perhaps, no one questioned these notions in the scripture; but ample space and reasons have been provided by the writer in Parva while discussing the dharma principle, its observance, violation, its offshoots and the rigmarole created using this apparently meaningless principle at multiple situations and by many characters in the story. This principle appears to have been exploited by the characters and situations creating complex and meaningless psychic ramblings to justify self deeds in the name of dharma. This paper attempts an independent overview of these confusing concepts in Parva.

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Introduction:

*“Yada yada hi Dharmasya glanirbhavati bharat,
Abhyutthanam dharmasya tadatmanam srajamyham.
Paritranay sadhunam vinashay ch dushkritam,
Dharm sansthapnarthaya sambhmami yuge yuge”
(Mahabharata: 266).*

Whenever there is suppression of righteousness, I take the form/reincarnate in the world to establish the righteousness again is the meaning of this Sanskrit shloka. The whole of *Mahabharata* story revolves around the principle of Dharma/righteousness. There is no reason to question for being right in personal as well as in social life, but who/what is there to decide what is wrong and what is right is the crux behind this pertinent and confusing question in life. Well, in *Parva* and even in the epic *Mahabharata* the ancient *Vedas/Vedic* Dharma is the authority to decide a person or his deeds, whether right or wrong. This Vedic Dharma through its studious sages guided men indifferently in these works representing humanity in the time it relates. This is as true in the serious matters like ruling a kingdom, looking after the subjects, waging a war against someone or routine things like marrying a woman, begetting children from her and for every other thing in day-to-day life. As *Vedas* have been acclaimed for being outright authority in the matters of righteousness and Dharma, there is no reason of questioning. Problem arises when more than one principle/s are followed in the name of the supreme dharma. It confuses the reader in *Parva* when confronts the situations. Quite often that happens in *Parva* from beginning to the end. This paper attempts to investigate and study the concepts of *Dharma* and *Adharma*

comparatively as used in the novel *Parva*. Arvind Adiga, a noted writer comments aptly on *Parva* and *Mahabharata* being based on the *Dharma* issue in the words: “Anthropology displaces mythology in *Parva*. We are in a specific historical era, the late Vedic period, at a time when north India is a patchwork of kingdoms, urban centres and tribal communities. The absence of political unity results in a multiplicity of ethical systems. Monogamy and polygamy are legal in the cities, but not polyandry — which is, however, *Dharma* in the forests. Out of this clash of competing *Dharmas* is born the Kurukshetra war” (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/books/an-epic-without-heroes/article1-899306.aspx>)

The *Dharma* Principle as Base of the Story of *Mahabharata* in *Parva*:

The novel begins describing the customary life in the kingdom of Madra ruled by eighty four year old king Salya. Salya, his son Rukmaratha and daughter Hiranyavati are the focus of attention in this part. Salya and his son Rukma are worried about the marriage of Hiranyavati. Though, they too are the pure Kshatriyas, but they themselves and even their counterparts in the northern and eastern parts of the land consider them inferior. Even the practice of marriage is different, is learnt from the discussions. They have an old custom of bride-price in marriage. Where as in the Kuru-Panchalas (superior Aryans) they offer gifts cart loaded and purchase a wife through marriage. Salya had offered his sister Madri in marriage to Pandu of Kuru lineage and established blood ties with an ancient lineage of unmatched repute. It was Bhishma who had visited to Madra kingdom with the proposal but, thereafter no contact between these two kingdoms.

These past events are discussed in connection with marriage of Hiranyavati. Salya says, “The central and supreme moral law for us is that it is the highest sin to waste a woman’s period of fertility. I consider it my duty to enforce this law, not to tolerate any transgression of this law” (*Parva*: 07). This is what Salya believes in the ancient *dharma* in regard with marriage. But, Rukma is after arranging a *Svayamvara* for his daughter. It is beyond their reach to do so hence, the marriage is prolonged. Even Madri had never been to her natal home after tying her knot with impotent Pandu. This all is discussed in the

backdrop of the happenings in Hastinavati, the kingdom of Kauravas headed by Duryodhana and the Khandavprastha, Kingdom of Pandavas headed by Dharmaraja. This story of Salya and his family, their blood relations and associations with the rest of Aryan rulers, their beliefs of ancient *Dharma* and *Adharma* with process of life creates such confusion that the reader is left aghast. It is in the end only we come to know about the marriage of Hiranyavati with a Naga youth against the wish of her family.

Though, there are issues of *Dharma* and *Adharma* on every page in *Parva*, but the crucial one is in respect with the *Niyoga* tradition among the Aryans in general and Kurus in particular. Its history in the light of *Vedas* has never been discussed. In reality, the entire Kuru lineage survived through the *Niyoga* principle. Then the question, why it is been objected by Duryodhana in case of Pandavas and deprived them of their share in kingdom remains unanswered. The reader assumes some clarification from the scholarly and experienced people like Bhishma, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, Vidura and the *sages* like Krishna Dvaipayana. The last one is the sage behind the continuity of Kuru lineage. He speculates over the past events when Bhishma arrives to seek his advice, whether *Niyoga* was sanctioned by *Dharma* or it was violation of *Dharma* straight from the battle field just before the war starts. He remembers: "When Vichitraveerya died without children. This meant the end of Kuru lineage. But Bhishma had taken the vow of celibacy for life. Convinced that the path of *Dharma* demanded the continuation of the lineage through *Niyoga*, it was Bhishma who, on the advice of his mother invited me to perform the *Niyoga*. Why did this Kuru grandfather who was then fully convinced that *Niyoga* was *Dharma* now entertain doubts about the Dharmic validity of the *Niyoga* performed on his younger brother's daughters-in-law, that too, with husband's consent? (*Parva*: 591). He was ignorant of the true meaning and validity of the practice of this principle among the Aryans. Further, he clears the mist saying, "...it is a *ksatriya* practice and custom. It suited the *Ksatriyas* who were anxious that the kingdoms they had taken pains to build up should remain with their own lineage till the end of time. How could I, donning matted hair, whose

only worldly wealth consisted in the deer-skin mat and the vessel to carry ritual water, grasp its full meaning?" (*Parva*: 591).

This speculation of the sage on the crucial question of *Dharma* about the practice of *Niyoga* facilitates the reader with some light to understand this complex principle to some extent. In fact, the reader finally arrives at the assumption that the whole of *Vedic Dharma* has been spoiled by the *Aryans* as per their need and necessity is the fact visible in the fictional work of Bhayrappa. Even the rules for practising the *Niyoga* stated by Bhishma have been created by him distorting the original custom is the belief of the *Sage* Krishna Dvaipayana. He asserts, "Yes, the distortion of the customs was Bhishma's handiwork" (*Parva*: 593). It is through the experienced maid-servant of Ambike that the *Sage* could know and perform successfully *Niyoga* on the mother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu to give heirs to the *Kurus*. This truth behind the survival of this great lineage in the *Aryavrata* since the ancient times seems to have been distorted by the revered Bhishma. What can be the reason behind this distortion has been given ample thought in *Parva*. Bhishma in *Parva* and in the other works based on *Mahabharata* has been looked upon as father figure. He is respected and followed by other rulers in the matters of *Dharma*. So his deeds and approvals are the iconic for the ordinary people and for the reader.

Bhishma appears to be confused at times while facing the situations. Though, he accepted and remained a celibate throughout his life but could not avoid problems of householder. While handling these problems he had to get toiled and assert certain disguising *Dharmic* principles. He refused to become a *Brahmin* like his uncle Devapi without saying a word and remained in Hastinavati to safeguard the throne of *Kurus*. Had he been strong enough and supported the cause of *Niyoga* as right as per the true *Dharma*, there would have been no war among the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*. While reflecting on the past memories, Bhishma opens the old book of *Kuru* history and approvingly says about his relationship with Krishna Dvaipayana his father Parasara and mother Matsyagandha, "It is only more recently that the *Ksatriyas* have started to avoid marrying brides with children born out of wedlock. But in those days, things were different. How fast the world changes. If

this is the case, then what will happen to our ancient *Dharma*, the *sanatan Dharma*?" (*Parva*: 508).

This speculation of Bhishma confuses the reader. Creates doubts about the grandfather of Kurus. Perhaps, the changing customs among the *Aryans* were beyond the control and understanding of Bhishma also. Hence, he could not stand in support of Pandavas, though inwardly he felt and favoured them strategically before and during the war. He too is shocked with the fast changing world and worried about the observance of the *sanatan Dharma*. The reader gets baffled after confronting the multiple versions of *Dharma* and their validity changing from page to page. More than their observance, the followers appear to be indulged in creating confusion for self justification.

One another practice among the *Aryans* we see in *Parva* that is protecting the chastity of women or testing it by sniffing the head of the child. The *Aryans* would accept children born to their own wives. It was the *dharma* of the queen to maintain the chastity. But, after marriage, the bride among the *Aryans* was sent with many young servant maids and companions to her husband's home. Now, these servant maids use to work for the queen as well as for the king. The eighty six Kauravas born to Dhritarashtra were born to servant maids and only the remaining out of hundred born to Gandhari were sniffed by him. This is visible enough that the *Aryans* exploited the rules of true *Arya Dharma* and made it a tool to exploit their counterparts as well as the subordinates in the false name of *dharma*. As per the true *Arya Dharma* in the *Devas* community of the Himalayas, none has a right to jilt and humiliate a woman. A woman use to marry all men of the clan and all children born in a clan were the children to all men of the age group. But, as per the new *dharma* Ugrasena, father of Kamsa refused to sniff his head for being born to her queen from Drumila and even Dhritarashtra did not sniff the heads of those children born to servant maids is in reality *Adharma*. But it is never accepted. The novel comes to an end with the scene of horde of raped women now pregnant from the war front at the door of Dharmaraja; asking him who will accept their children is symbolic. That is how the Kuru lineage has survived and extended in the past and is the true *Arya Dharma*. Death of Kuru

lineage takes place with the death of the child of Ashwattama before his birth (last hope for the Kurus) and once again Draupadi suggests Uttare to undergo *Niyoga*. Thus, there are countless such instances the reader gets confused and puzzled taking the *dharma* and *Adharma* issues in life of the characters of *Parva* (*Mahabharata*).

The War Episode and the *Dharma/Adharma Tatva*:

In *Parva*, there is a series of monologues and very long dialogues. Through these discourses, the reader knows the course of happening into back and forth. This all in the backdrop happens and results into the war. A large part of the novel narrates the unusual and unpredictably destructive war for both the sides. The preparation for the war busied them all. Many neighbouring and distant kings with their armies have joined either of the sides. Even while getting support of the other kings, tricks have been used by both, Kauravas and Pandavas. Sometimes relations have been exploited and always the disguising *Arya Dharma* has been used as a tool for exploitation. Finally, the troops have settled in the outskirts of Hastinavati. Parties on both the sides are busy in convincing their allies their stand as per the supreme principle of *Arya Dharma*. Duryodhana successfully convinces King Salva that the Pandavas and the Drupads invaded this war on them to destroy the key cultural centre of the Aryans, Hastinavati. Duryodhana declares Pandavas and Drupads with their supporters in war as, "...either non-Aryans or at best semi-Aryans" (*Parva*: 462). The root cause, *Dharma/Adharma* of the *Mahabharata* story in *Parva* continues even on battlefield. No action in the novel is free from this life governing *tatva*.

Bhishma, the supreme commander of the Kurus keeps on humiliating Duryodhana continuously. It is difficult to judge on whose side Bhishma is. He has taken responsibility to shoulder the chief of the army position of Duryodhana but appears to be performing in favour of the Pandavas. He discourages Duryodhana and insults him by saying, "I have not lost a battle yet. And I may say you have never won any war waged by you" (*Parva*: 491). He also reminds Duryodhana of his being wrong when advises, "A true *Ksatriya* must fight a war and then win... He must never loot by gambling" (*Ibid*). The intention of the iconic

Bhishma is clear and visible. When he declares to make a public announcement of the cause of the war giving options to the soldiers: either to join the enemy or remain aloof or fight to win things became clear. It is both *Dharma* and *Adharma* on his part. It seems, by heart he is in support of Pandavas but cannot say publically so, doing his level best to follow the true *Dharma* by helping them strategically.

The whole business of war and even routine things among these Aryans appear like a game of dice played in the name of *Dharma*. Every other person in key position exploits this life governing principle for his own interests. It is not out of ignorance but out of sheer worldly wisdom. They have understood that, they can fool others and through them a large populace as well. In this connection, the incident of King Salya's dilemma after the death of his two sons Vijaya and Ajaya and the news brought by his priest Homadatta from his kingdom Madra proves to be a witness of creating helpless situations for people using these meaningless terms. His kingdom is been attacked by the *Nagas*. He is in utter confusion taking this reason. He imagines seeking help of Arjuna against the *Nagas*. But, Duryodhana persuades him that how can he ask help to a person who has killed his two sons, and poor Salya gets into the darkness. The crux behind this strategy is to make use of Salya is exposed when he asks Duryodhana the way out of the *Naga* invasion over Madra. When the *Nagas* are fighting on his own side and he entrusts Salya by saying, "They are there for just one purpose-to kill their arch foe, Arjuna. After they kill Arjuna, we shall surround them and finish them off..." (*Parva*: 791).

Thus, for these men in *Parva* nothing is important than their own kingdom and its safety. They are friend to nobody out of their interest. Every other king joined in this warfare including the two parties of Kauravas and Pandavas out of some interest is a fact. T. Pradeep in his studied review of the book writes rightly: "In Short, *Parva* is a *Mahabhart* in reality. Every character is human. Each and every character created is a complex package which feels a gamut of emotions be it jealousy, romance, politics, anger, forgiveness. Pandavas fight among themselves is as much as each of them introspect into their own lives and decisions which gives rise to several important questions of the basic epic

(<http://booksrevisit.blogspot.in/2014/05/ParvaBookReviewSLBhyrappa.html>)". *Dharma* for them is an issue not more than a tool for justification of their deeds. You do something of your interest and the ancient *Vedic Dharma* is there at hand to exploit and justify your deeds is the overall nature of this principle in *Parva*.

Conclusion:

Thus, *Dharma* and *Adharma* have created such rigmarole in *Parva* and in the original book of Mahabharata; there seems no way out of this meaningless thing even in our time. If the philosophy propounded through this story has been the base of life for a huge population, it needs to be given thought again and again. If not the characters and their deeds be corrected now, we can question their deeds and words. Through rational questioning only these false mythical wrongs can be pointed and corrected. There are many such wrongs in the story narrated by Bhyrappa in *Parva*. In fact, the author has exhibited and questioned many evils in the original book while shaping his imagination going more close to life through the law of probability in the mythical world. He has displaced and dismantled the myth to make it more reliable and life like.

Through the discussions in the text among the characters and through their deeds, the reader understands the key issues of creating confusion in the name of *Dharma*. It is not always *Dharma* but it is the base of all other evils, the reader comes across. Perhaps, Vyasa was wise enough and is the first writer who could write about the principle enemy of mankind. *Parva* narrates the life governed in the name of such meaningless concepts and raises questions about such foolishness. *Dharma* is what Bhishma did not practice openly and support the cause of true *Dharma*. He went on safeguarding his false ideas of being a part of the most ancient lineage (Kuru). Knowingly or unknowingly he continues with the *Adharma* in reality but pretended to be safeguarding the *Arya Dharma*. Finally, the reader is blank and confused. The questions, who is the victor in this war? What is the true *Dharma*? Remain unanswered. In fact, there is nothing called true *Dharma* and *Adharma*. *Dharma*

appears to have been exploited to justify and safeguard one's own deeds by all is the truth in *Parva*.

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