

## THE KURUKSHETRA CONFLICT- A MERE LITERATURE OR A STRUGGLE TO RE-ESTABLISH DHARMA?

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### Abstract

*The Kurukshetra war often called as 'Mahabharata War' is described as a conflict that arose from a dynastic succession of struggle between paternal cousins. It involved a number of kingdoms of those times participating as allies of the rival groups. The war narrative forms more than quarter of the epic. The individual struggle for victory, the military formation, war diplomacy, meetings and deliberations, weapons used are all described. This great war was looked at by succeeding generations as an end of an epoch. The two supreme commanders met and framed "Rules of ethical conduct" required for the Dharmayuddha. Krishna himself speaks about how war is the result of escalation of adharma and how Yugapurusha manifests himself to re-establish Dharma, Peace, Morality and Ethics. "Whenever there is deterioration of Dharma, I manifest to uplift Dharma. I appear in every epoch to protect the noble and destroy the wicked and Re-establish Dharma". Dharma in this context would mean what is a timeless truth. What was, what is and what will be. It is called so because it has the capacity to sustain beyond the realm of time and space. The paper examines the role of Kurukshetra war in re-establishing peace and equilibrium in the society. Sources and references would be Vyasa Bharata, its various editions, research papers on the topic, references from literacy pieces in other languages published and unpublished works on the chosen theme.*

**Keywords:** War, Peace, Dharma, Mahabharata, Kurukshetra, Krishna.

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### 1. Introduction:

The Kurukshetra war is popularly known as Mahabharatha war. At the outset it looks like a struggle for succession between groups of paternal cousins. The war took place in Kurukshetra which is currently housed in Haryana. The narrative forms the major part of the epic. It describes individual battles and death of various heroes on either side, the military formation, war diplomacy, meetings or discussions among the allies. Even to this day the historicity of war is a topic of discussion among the scholars.

### 2. A brief history of the war

At the outset the war looks like a fight between the potential cousins for the throne. However the escalation was much a result of establishment of peace and re-establishment of righteousness as Lord Krishna himself describes it in the apocalypse of his session to Arjuna in Bhagavadgita. The place where it was fought is known as 'Dharmakshetra'. As the very name suggests any unrighteous act on either side would be forgiven as the location was this land of righteousness.

The early fragments of the war was seen in the Sabha Parva itself, where the young and the beautiful queen of the Pandavas, Draupadi was dragged into the open court hall and molested in an assembly full of varied kinds of people. It was she who kept alive the fury of her husband's to fight and get back their kingdom. The war was her escalated answer to the unrighteous attitude of Duryodhana and his brothers. It was she who had tread the path of hardship, as a royal princess who said that a war was inevitable to settle scores with Duryodhana who driven by jealousy refused to share even a blade of grass from his kingdom with the Pandavas who had completed their long drawn period of exile. Whether a bitter war of this magnitude happened between the Kauravas and Pandavas is debatable as the historicity of the Kurukshetra war is subject to scholarly discussion and dispute. It is possible that the war was a small internal

conflict, transformed into an epic of this magnitude in which it exists today. It would have undergone layers of development. However, whatever may be the inconclusiveness of the data, attempts have been made to assign a historical data to the Kurukshetra war. Popular tradition says that it marks the transition to the Kaliyuga and its dates to 3102 BCE.

Kurukshetra war assumes a place of paramount importance not only from the literary perspective but also as an epoch making incident as most of the later generations looked upon it as 'Marking the end of an epoch'.

### 3. The Beginning

Sanjaya the war chronicle to Dhritarastra has given a description of all the continents on earth, the planets, Indian sub-continent, the kingdoms, tribes, provinces, towns, villages, rivers, mountains, forests of the Bharatha varsha. A panoramic view of geography of undivided India is described by the poet through Sanjaya. The military formation of each day, the nature of the battle fought, the fall or death of a hero on each day, the details of the war racing are all given by him. This could have been methodically adopted by Veda Vyasa to narrate the minutest details of the battle to the readers of the later times. For Vyasa, human beings were the greatest of all the beings. He was a visionary poet who looked ahead of his times and was very sure that in future too there would be battles which would be fought for varied reasons. He also knew that such battles though underlined that dharma prevailed and good were victors and evil vanquished at the end of it, it always resulted in death, violence, bloodshed and large scale destruction. The fundamental question here is did not Duryodhana realize that triggering a war was suicidal for him? At the end of the battle, there was not even a single Kaurava to represent their clan. Vyasa himself says that, at the end of the war, the Kauravas remained only in their names.

### 4. The Peace Mission

A feud, fight, misunderstanding, communication gap are all resolved generally by the intervention of an elderly person who assumes the role of an advisor or an emissary. In this context Krishna made an attempt to strike a peace treaty. In the real sense it was a 'public space' created by Krishna for Duryodhana to prevent the battle which would leave a permanent scar to all connected directly or indirectly. The epic speaks of the lack of public space due to bad governance. In a political discourse the rights of the political minorities should be righteous, protected as all the citizens are part of political minority at some time or other and it should

always be remembered that the minority is a persuading factor. In Udyoga Parva when Krishna comes as an emissary to strike peace treaty we find Duryodhana sending encoded message to Krishna to establish his superiority. It is a matter of argument as to how he could suffer from superiority complex? This incident shows how the welfare of a state is dependent upon the direction a leader provides. When arrogance of power reaches its peak, it humbles down or results in the destruction because of bad leadership. Krishna advises Duryodhana on the importance of good leadership. Duryodhana whose mind was averse to peace and dwelt upon the thought of a war rejected the public space created by Krishna. However the powerful discourse of Krishna showed no dichotomy between the particular and the individual. Language of experience combined with the language of transcendence. Krishna was capable of convincing and communicating powerfully in front of everyone. He was able to stand out in front of a barbaric and tyrannical ruler. His peace treaty was controlled by prohibition, opposition of reason and madness and opposition between the truth and falsehood. The thoughts and viewpoints were communicated perfectly. The ritual of Krishna's discourse, the gestures made by him, the circumstances in which he came as an embassy, the imposed significances of his words, their effect on those addressed clearly indicates that political discourses are barely dissociable from the functioning of the ritual. This doctrine was directed at social appropriation. The message was so powerful that though the effort for peace was a failure, the message left a marked impact on all the listeners. The analysis of this discourse does not reveal the universality of meaning but brings in light the action of imposed rarity, with a fundamental power of affirmation. The despotism and inequality may chiefly prevail in human beings due to quality of mind. Some men enjoy varied privileges due to being richer, more honored and more powerful. The dialogs of these kind would assume that every individual would be directed to the path of righteousness, dharma would prevail and the so called marginalized would get back their spaces. It would not be fair and just to call these as mere dialogs to showcase oratory or satisfy one's mind, but they are powerful discourses which concentrate on protection of subjects rights in the truest sense of the word. War is not the only answer to escalated issues. Creation of public space of these kinds would directly have a direct bearing on the progress of a society. Cultural interactions of the kind of dialogs of Krishna create effective space for better understanding of life at large. Attempts for peace create conditions in which a person can fulfil his or her human worth.

## 5. The proper battle

The epic battle was raged for eighteen days at Kurukshetra. Great warriors of valor and repute fell day by day. The war culminated into fights of various kinds, in all formats, between various warriors. The venerable Bhishma lay on a bed of arrows and bestowed on Yudhishthira on the codes of conduct for life, living and ruling. The combined number of warriors totaled to 3.94 million. Sophisticated weapons were used. At times special formations were ordered by the superior commanders. These were rules of engagement which were termed as “rules of ethical conduct”.

This war was considered as one of the bloodiest wars ever fought in human history. There were heart breaks, curses procured and the signs let out. The curse of Ghandari had a bearing on Yadhava clan where a murderous rebellion ensued amongst the clan and the Yadhavas ended up killing each other and wiping out their entire race. In totality war hampers the development for a long time and the places where the battle are fought.

## 6. Conclusion

It still baffles one as to how and why a war of this magnitude of Kurukshetra happened and what was the message it conveyed. The question of history and meaning is explored at many levels. These discussions dwell upon ‘desha’, ‘kaala’ and ‘paatra’. The dialogs mainly focus on the context in which the person leaves and has his being. Undoubtedly every event is located within history. In every act of relating it man is given an opportunity to transcend history not only as an ethical necessity but also as a spiritual necessity. The enquiry related to Kurukshetra war moves on to different planes and throughout Mahabharatha. We find the Mahabharatha establishes a relationship between history and its transcendence, eternal and transient and the substance of life and relationship. The participants in the battle are neither idolatry of history nor the empty obstruction of transcendence. The history of the battle is marked by gradual accretion as well as by quantum leap, paradigm shifts, revolution that compromise epochs in the material and spiritual evolution of mankind. There is much reason to believe that Kurukshetra war is not a mere literature or dialog, but an epoch which transmitted diffusion memories for proper knowledge.

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