



## THE MAHABHARATA: PARADIGM SHIFT IN VALUES

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### ABSTRACT

*The ancient epics have played a significant role in introducing a set of values and ethics to youngsters. Lord Ram or Lord Krishna are known to today's generation through comics, animation and audio-visual. Their rational minds raise doubts about morals, ethics, culture of old times. They are not at fault because the text that they are reading or watching does not exist in the modern world. They are taught to respect it as a holy book but they try to defend it in their own way. These old classics are represented in an innovative and experimental combination of the old and the new. The present paper is a humble attempt in which the researcher tries to show that how ancient values have been followed in modern terms. The ancient epics have played a significant role in introducing a set of values and ethics to youngsters. Values and ethics are permanent and unending but ancient values are difficult to inculcate in modern times. The old set of values and ethics have been altered and modified as per the cultural practices of the present day. The Mahabharata has always remained a controversy due to depiction of fiction and reality. It is now accepted as a fictitious story written by Sage Ved Vyasamuni before it happened. It gives a fundamental knowledge of Good vs. bad, virtues vs. vices, law vs. crimes, purity vs. impurity, morality vs. immorality, dignity vs. respect and so on. Considering the length of a research article it is difficult to throw light on all virtues and values depicted in the Mahabharata. The researcher has decided to deal with the popular 'Game of Dice' through which the changing paradigm shift in understanding, analyzing and interpreting the old value system and how it can be modified and altered in modern times is shown. The game of dice provoked the Kauravas and Pandavas to fight the last battle for 'Justice and Victory of Dharma over Adharma' on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The researcher expresses deep sense of gratitude to age-old beliefs and values inculcated through epics but modern outlook has to be taken into consideration as a new beginning of scientific era.*

**Key Terms:** *Paradigm Shift, the Mahabharata, The game of Dice, The Kauravas, the Pandavas, Kurukshetra etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

Every society has been passing through constant change in cultural practices. The old value system has to be molded according to the changing way of living. The basic difference

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between the animal being and the human being is human's rational thinking and use of conscience. Human beings prefer to live in civilized society in which certain codes and conducts are mandatory to follow in order to live life comfortably and happily. Every society has their value system that has come into practice as per the need of the hour. The concept of virtue and vice must have deliberately introduced to conquer the demon within us. Values and ethics are permanent, unending and are an integral part of our civilization. Still the ancient values are difficult to inculcate in modern times. Since the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are ancient epics, they are popular among students. We refer them as examples to teach values and ethics. The twenty-first century students raise queries about unscientific and illogical illustrations and interpretations of these epics. Foreign teachers and students are also very curious about unbelievable mythological stories. Although it is a fact that ancient epics and religious holy books are written according to social, religious and cultural practices of that time they have been transferred from one generation to the other. In the age of remix and gimmicks old classics, songs, arts and fine arts have once again become popular among all due to its representation in modern style through adaptations, animation, audio-visual and so on. Rational scrutiny of it helps us to understand it in a better way. The present paper is a humble attempt in which the researcher tries to show that how ancient values have been followed in modern times. The ancient epics have played a significant role in introducing a set of values and ethics to youngsters. Lord Ram or Lord Krishna are popular heroes of today's generation through comics, animation and audio-visual. Their rational mind raises doubts about morals, ethics, culture of old times. They try to defend and represent the old classics in innovative combination of the old and the new. The old set of values and ethics have been altered and modified as per the conditions of the present day. We are living in transnational, cross cultural and cosmopolitan era. We have accepted and loved modern adaptations of Shakespeare's plays due to their universal themes. New interpretations and insights of the old epics should be received as a healthy and rational practice of today. Let us consider the importance of value system by referring to a few men of the millennium.

Mahatma Gandhi has rightly pointed out the importance of values and ethics that our beliefs become our thoughts, our thoughts become our words, our words become our actions, our actions become our habits, our habits become our values, our values become our destiny. On the other hand Albert Einstein's values are reflected in his simple ideology of rejection to possessions, outward success, publicity, luxury. He says, 'To me these have always been contemptible. I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone, best for both the body and the mind.' A brief introduction of the old classic and Hindu religious epic The Mahabharata is necessary for other than Indian readers.

The Mahabharata has always remained a controversy due to depiction of fiction and reality. It is now accepted as a fictitious story written by Sage Ved Vyasamuni before it happened. Since it is a holy book of Hindu religion that deals with practical aspect of life it has been translated in almost all languages of the world. It can be described as an epic of fables that



can be applied to both the ancient and the modern civilization. Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, originally written in Sanskrit is considered as an ancient Hindu religious text that is known as a highest kind of literature and philosophy. Bhagvad stands for God and Gita is a pious song of the Hindu religion. VyasaMuni had portrayed Lord Krishna as the common man from a backward class who plays several roles like a lyricist, a singer and a philosopher who sang this holy song on Kurukshetra. The value of the book lies in its principle of social equality through which anyone from a high caste or a low caste can read it anywhere, at any time. It is a story of Kauravas and Pandavas developed within 100000 shlokas whereas The Bhagvad Gita is a part of the Mahabharata that is a treaties or guiding principle of 700 shlokas about how to live life. The Mahabharata is a tale that aims at teaching four Purusharthas namely Dharmam, Ardhm, Kamam and Moksham. The book has produced many great and noble souls of modern times. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, followed a virtue of selfless service and philosophy of Karma from it. Sir Arobindo found it as a spiritual guide. Swami Vivekanand learnt yogic techniques from it. Aldous Huxley found it a book that generates human values. Jawaharlal Nehru practiced duties of life from it. J Robert Oppenheimer finds it as philosophy of life. Ralph Waldo Emerson has got transcendental experience though it. Lord Waren Hesting described it as a sublime thought. Sunita Williams learned the Mantras of time and space from it. Rudolf Steiner followed purification of soul in it. It gives a fundamental knowledge of Good vs. bad, virtues vs. vices, laws vs. crimes, purity vs. impurity, morality vs. immorality, and dignity vs. respect and so on.

The Mahabharata is an ancient epic that has been compared to Homer's Eliad and Odyssey in grandeur of thought and action. The epic is under strict rational scrutiny in modern times due to unscientific and fictitious imaginative tales. If it is considered as a literary text and the characters as literary figures then there is no point in defending but if it is considered as a holy book then we become blind followers. We don't want to raise an objection against a holy book. Students all over the world are innocent readers and they do dare to raise their doubts to their teachers. There are several versions of the epic that differ in story line, style, narration and so on. Today it is the most controversial text that modern readers try to deconstruct as per their rational way of looking at it. But it has also left everlasting impact on the minds of the audience of all ages. The epic is best known as the book that has taught values and ethics of how to live life practically, happily and successfully. Shrimad Bhagvad Gita is accepted as it is because it deals with practical answers to all queries of all ages. We want our children to be like Arjun, Karna, Eklavya, Bhishma, Yama and so on. The children are children and they cannot be like somebody else. Considering the length of a research article it is difficult to throw light on all virtues and values depicted in the Mahabharata. Although there are several stories that can be scrutinized in modern outlook the researcher has concentrated on one very important event known as 'the game of Dice'. This particular incident has provoked the Kauravas and Pandavas to fight the last battle for 'Justice and Victory of Dharma over Adharma' on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. A brief idea of the game is given further.

The dice game from the Mahabharata can help us to understand that how ancient values are changed in the due course of time. The dice is an ancient game in which two parties/opponents are involved. One has to decide a particular number and if the dice shows the same number it is a sign of victory. It is a sort of Gambling that provokes the person to test his/her luck. Life is a journey of catching uncatchable fruit called 'hope'. No one has succeeded to possess it till date. But at the same time life would have become meaningless if hope would have died. This hope of gaining everything easily with the help of dice would have made Yudhishtir to play with his crooked cousins. Shakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana and the brother of Gandhari is a cunning mind behind the game. He knows that his nephew cannot defeat Pandavas on the battlefield so he decides to defeat the brave and powerful opponents like Pandavas in Dice. He has made dice from his dead father's bone of thighs that is considered as working in his favour. The game is planned when Yudhishtir's brothers are away from Hastinapur. Yudhishtir loves the game so he easily agrees to play. He loses his wealth initially, kingdom and then he loses his brothers in the game. Yudhishtir is asked to quit the game and is promised to live in Hastinapur as a common man. His greed for winning forces him to continue the game. He is challenged by his cunning cousins to keep his wife Draupadi as his only possession. He accepts the challenge and plays in the name of Drupadi. Five Pandavas along with their wife Draupadi become slaves of Kauravas. Although Yudhishtir loses everything he is challenged second time. He once again loses and is asked to spend twelve years in Vanawasa and one in Adnyatwas. The incident can be analyzed and interpreted through various angles. Let us analyse it through the main characters.

Yudhishtir, known as Dharmaraj, who always stands for truth and honesty, has a tragic flaw in his character. He believes in people easily. He likes to fulfill the wishes of his family members and his subjects. His word is considered as a final word in any complicated situation. Bhagwan Vyas has depicted this character with saintly qualities whose chariot moves 'one foot up' from the ground due to his trustworthiness and his righteous behavior. He loses his senses due to his passion for winning and gambling that turns the table in losing everything. In the point of view of a modern critic gambling is a kind of unethical and immoral act that has been promoted by the ideal man like Dharmaraj! On the other hand it was completely ethical in ancient times! Children in modern times may raise questions that if Draupadi's husbands would have fought for their wife what would have been the end then? It is quite obvious because they have gone through the history of rebellions. There are chances that they might have read Spartakas's story that rebelled as a slave against the existing system. Today we have been taught to rebel against injustices so it is difficult to ask them to follow the foot prints of Pandavas. Though it was proper as per the ancient time but how can five helpless inactive husbands be the role models of modern girls? The old value of obeying the orders of the elders is challenged by new value system of 'tit for tat'. Yudhishtir is known for his justice and ironically enough he keeps his obedient brothers and wife on hold in the game. He forgets to treat them as individuals and does not bother to take their consent. His

tragic flaw is so dominating that he gets tempted second time for the Dice. Dharma, in ancient times, did mean doing right things at a right time. Dharma today is taking a stand against bad practices. In old times brothers used to follow their eldest brother but today hierarchy is dismantled. The righteous one has to be followed in modern times.

Duryadhana and Karna are portrayed as Pandavas' enemies. Though they defeat Yudhishtir in the game of dice they fail to understand that 'the blood is thicker than water'. Duryadhana wants to become king so his revengeful behavior can be justifiable. Karna, being the eldest Pandava, should have been neutral but he tries to support his friend Duryadhana. Their behavior is condemned as unethical in ancient and modern times. Draupadi's 'Vastraharan' for them is 'everything is fare in love and war'. We experience Cathartic effect as we feel pity for Pandavas and we fear that this can happen to anyone of us in the anarchic kingdom of Hastinapur.

Shakuni, Duryodhana's uncle, can be blamed for his tragic flaw of lust for power. He is smart enough who never challenges Pandavas for the battle. He shrewdly entraps them in the game of dice. Passion for power is a common characteristic of all ages but going to any extent is a tragic flaw. If dice game would not have been played in the Mahabharata it would have been a story of different end. His revengeful attitude turns into complete tragedy of the Kauravas. The cunning characters like Shakuni were blamed in ancient and modern times. Forget and forgive is the policy that works as a viper on our bosom.

Draupadi, the wife of five Pandavas, loses her dignity in front of her five husbands. Modern generation may have an objection of holding her as an object in the game. In ancient time wives were the possession of their husbands. Draupadi had no choice but to follow the decision of her husband. Modern girls would have a different stand. They would hate this value of following wrong decisions of their husbands that encroach their independence and freedom. Today 'individual space' is a prime concern of all of us. But in the game of dice space of marginalized have not been taken into consideration. Still she is shown bold enough who challenges all the seniors in the assembly about their passive roles. She dares to raise her voice against patriarchal rule. Through the lenses of modern criticism Draupadi could have been avoided her tragedy if she would have stopped following her unethical husbands. Children may get confused about the concepts of Dharma and Adharma in modern times because Dharma is a very subjective term today.

Arjun, the hero of the Mahabharata, the idol of bravery, does not dare to disobey his eldest brother. He takes a stand on the battlefield that he does not want to fight against his relatives but he is passive during the game of dice. He is portrayed as changing impossible into possible. His bravery becomes useless when he does not save his wife. Modern criticism scrutinizes his inactiveness as his defeat. The further battle would have been avoided if he would have taken a stand in spite of all adversities in the assembly.

Lord Krishna is the most celebrated king and the lord of the Mahabahrata. According to Holy Scriptures the God was born on the earth when law and order is in danger. He comes to save the world from complete anarchy. Lord Krishna is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who comes in human form to save the world from Adharma! God appears when the hundred pots of vices would be filled by the villains; he comes and saves the world by killing the demon. The very idea of God and Demon is under rational scrutiny today. If Lord Krishna would not have been portrayed by Vyasmuni what would have been the end of the Mahabharata? For instance, let me take an example of Shylock. Sometimes we feel that Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* has his defense in the society. The Christians, who have many charges against a Jew like Shylock, how could they capture many slaves in their possession in seventeenth century? Don't they appear greedy about slaves when Shylock is greedy about wealth? Shylock is punished because he belongs to minority. Karna supports his friend during the game which is unethical but Yudhishtir's gambling and losing everything is not blamed as unethical!

Let us wind up the statement by stating that values are bound to be there in each society. There can have individual value, group value, social and moral values too. One must get freedom to choose his/her values and ethics. Whatever was right in the past may not be right in the present. Debates, discussions and arguments are the signs of lively society. The positive criticism can be taken in sporting spirit. It is a learning experience for all of us. Let us consider the Mahabharata as a literary text and support modern criticism as a literary criticism. Let us be open-ended and reconstruct or rewrite the text in new perspective.

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