This book challenges the view, common among Western scholars, that precolonial India lacked a tradition of military philosophy. It traces the evolution of theories of warfare in India from the dawn of civilization, focusing on the debate between *dharma yuddha* (just war) and *kutya yuddha* (unjust war) within Hindu philosophy. This debate centers around four questions: What is war? What justifies it? How should it be waged? And what are its potential repercussions? This volume provides evidence of the historical evolution of strategic thought on the Indian subcontinent that has heretofore been neglected by modern historians. Further, it provides a counterpoint to scholarship in political science that engages solely with Western theories in its analysis of independent India’s philosophy of warfare. Ultimately, a better understanding of the legacy of ancient India’s strategic theorizing will enable more accurate analysis of modern India’s military and nuclear policies.

Kaushik Roy is a Reader in History at Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India, and Senior Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Civil War at the Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Norway. He is the author or editor of sixteen books and numerous journal articles, one of which won the Moncado Prize in 2006.
Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia

From Antiquity to the Present

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On an extremely cold day with heavy snowfall in January 2006, as I was wandering through the bunker-like labyrinths of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo and searching for the smoking room, I accidentally met Professor Gregory Reichberg. While chatting, he told me that he was interested in the interconnections between religious ethics and the conduct of warfare. Then he asked me if I had ever thought of the interconnections between one of the world’s oldest religions (Hinduism) and the conduct of war. I showed my interest and said that I was willing to research it. And then Reichberg said, well then, you are ‘in’ the project. I am extremely grateful to him not only for introducing the idea of the interrelationship between religion and warfare but also for sustaining me financially and morally for about five years while I was engaged in writing this monograph. While I was writing the monograph, my friend and mentor at PRIO, Professor Scott Gates, always made me conscious of what Hinduism has to say about unconventional (intra-state) warfare. This volume builds upon the two essays I published in the *Journal of Military Ethics* (2007) and in a volume published by the United Nations Press (2009), and also on the 30,000-word piece on Hinduism and warfare I wrote for an anthology as part of Reichberg’s project. I am also fortunate to have met Dr. Beatrice Rehl in Cyprus and then in Oslo; she kindly agreed to consider the volume for publication by Cambridge University Press. Thanks to the two unknown referees and my friend Torkel Brekke for their criticism and input. My special thanks to my wife, Suhrita, who accepted my
continuous ‘mindless’ chattering about the acharyas’ views on yuddha and vigraha during the last five years. As a final take, if this volume satisfies none of its readers but provokes them to think about the complex interstices between Hinduism and warfare, my work is done.

2012, Kolkata
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party, i.e., the right-wing Hindu party of independent India</td>
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<tr>
<td>COIN</td>
<td>Counter-insurgency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTBT</td>
<td>Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>East India Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMINT</td>
<td>Human intelligence, e.g., spies, undercover agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IESHR</td>
<td><em>Indian Economic and Social History Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INA</td>
<td>Indian National Army or the <em>Azad Hind Fauj</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOR, BL</td>
<td>India Office Records, British Library, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPKF</td>
<td>Indian Peace Keeping Force deployed in Sri Lanka in the 1980s</td>
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<tr>
<td>JME</td>
<td><em>Journal of Military Ethics</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JMH</td>
<td><em>Journal of Military History</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Strategic Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Line of Control, i.e., the boundary between India and Pakistan, especially in the disputed region of Kashmir</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (homeland)</td>
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<td>MAS</td>
<td><em>Modern Asian Studies</em></td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Manava Dharmastra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>Microfilm Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>MODAR</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence Government of India Annual Report</td>
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<td>NAI</td>
<td>National Archives of India, New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPT</td>
<td>Non-Proliferation Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW</td>
<td>Prisoner of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGINT</td>
<td>Signal Intelligence, e.g., the use of satellites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acharya Brahmin advisor, teacher
Ahimsa Doctrine of non-violence, the opposite of himsa
Akharas Centres in the countryside where Hindu military recruits were trained in various physical exercises, especially in wrestling
Amatya Civil bureaucrat
Amitra Deserters from the enemy’s army; at times also a state in the mandala that harbours enmity towards the vijigishu
Anitya Uncertain, full of chance probability; result dependent on a random roll of dice
Ankush An iron rod with a curved point at the top; it was used by the mahout to pierce the brain of an elephant when the latter became uncontrollable due to injuries sustained on the battlefield
Artha Literal meaning: wealth; broadly, the term refers to anything connected to the material well-being of the people
Arthasastra Non-Vedic knowledge system concerned with artha
Aryaputra Literal meaning: sons of the Aryans; in early medieval India, the term referred to the Kshatriyas/thakurs and later to the Rajputs
Aryavarta Domains of the Aryans, i.e., north India for the ancient and medieval Hindu intellectuals
Aswamedha yagna Literal meaning: horse sacrifice; the conqueror sent a horse backed by his army. The horse traveled through the dominions of various kings. If these kings did not obstruct the horse, then theoretically they became tributaries of the conqueror. If any king stopped the horse as it was traveling through his dominion, then the army of the conqueror following the horse fought with that king. After victory, the horse was sacrificed in a yajna.
Glossary

Atavi Contingents provided by the tribal chieftains
Azad Hind Fauj Literal meaning: Independent India’s Army; two such armies were created from the Indian POWs captured by Germany and Japan. The Japanese-sponsored Azad Hind Fauj, also known as the Indian National Army, was initially led by Mohan Singh and later by the ex-Indian National Congress politician Subhas Chandra Bose.
Bakshi Commander-in-chief of the army of a Muslim state
Bala Army/use of force
Bans Primitive rockets used during warfare in pre-modern India
Bargi A Maratha cavalier who was provided a warhorse or pony by the government or the Maratha sirdar
Bazaar Market
Bhaga Royal share of the produce from land
Bhalla Heavy spear made of wood or bamboo
Bhang A liquid drug made of hemp
Bharat Bharat Varhsa (the country of Bharat), the Sanskrit name of Jambudvipa, i.e., the subcontinent; Bharat is the mythical first ruler of the subcontinent
Bharatiya Indianness, the way of life in Bharat
Bhedha Divide-and-rule policy
Bhikkus Ascetic Buddhist monks
Bhiksuki Female spy dressed as a mendicant woman
Bhrata Local volunteer auxiliaries or mercenaries
Brahmastra Astra means weapons in Sanskrit, and Brahma’s astra means weapons of Lord Brahma (creator of the cosmos); it means weapons of mass destruction not to be used during dharmayuddha. Modern Indian commentators interpret brahmastra as nuclear weapons.
Cakkavattin/Cakravartin A just monarch following the policies of peace and moderation; he is the opposite of vijigishu
Chara Spy/secret agent
Charka A circular weapon with serrated edges that was thrown towards the enemy; like a boomerang, it returned to the person who threw it. In Hindu mythology, Lord Krishna used this weapon.
Chaturanga Bala/Chaturangahalam Four-limbed army comprising foot soldiers, cavalry, elephants and chariots
Chaturvarna The ideal society of the Hindu jurists comprised of four castes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (businessmen and merchants) and Sudras (cultivators)
Chela Disciple of a guru
Glossary

Danda Literal meaning: a staff or a rod; it refers to the coercion (including the army) that should be used moderately by a ‘just’ ruler to maintain peace, prosperity and stability. Basically, it means use of force in a legal manner for running the polity.

Dandaniti The theory of statecraft involving judicious use of force

Dar al Harb Region of darkness, i.e., territories under non-Islamic rule

Dar al Islam House of light, i.e., region into which Islam has spread

Darsana Traditional Indian philosophy

Dhamma Buddhist equivalent of Hindu dharma

Dharma Not religion, but morality, code of conduct; dharma operates at three levels: at the personal level, at the community level and at the cosmic level

Dharmasastra Sacred knowledge system concerned with dharma; it refers to the vast body of literature in Sanskrit produced in ancient India dealing with legal and juridical precepts

Dharmayuddha Righteous war; it means war according to the sastras. Such a war could be started only for just reasons. Moreover, such a war must be waged in accordance with certain rules and regulations. It involves a set piece battle/combat at a place and time previously decided by the combatants. In Sanskrit literature this is known as prakasayuddha. Such a war involves minimal damage, and the combatants are forced to obey certain constraints on their conduct: non-combatants, prisoners and retreating soldiers are not harmed; flank and surprise attacks and nocturnal raids are not allowed, etc.

Dharmik A righteous person/ruler; one who follows dharma

Duta Diplomatic envoy

Faqir Holy Muslim mendicant

Gada Club/mace

Gauda Ancient Sanskrit name of Bengal

Giridurga Hill fort, i.e., a fort situated at the summit of a hill or in a mountainous region

Govisthi Raids for acquiring cattle

Guptachar The word is derived from Kautilya’s word chara. Literally, a chara means a spy, and guptachar means a secret spy.

Guptaghatak A mercenary who would commit murder secretly

Guru Literal meaning: master; the term refers to the acharya of a disciple

Harijan M. K. Gandhi’s term for the untouchables, i.e., those outside the caste system such as the tribes (traditional term nishadas). Gandhi also brought out a newspaper with this name.
Glossary

**Himsa** Violence, aggressiveness, anger, jealousy, all negative feelings that are the opposite of **ahimsa**

**Houdah** A box (made of wood and occasionally plated with iron) tied at the back of the war elephant with ropes. This box carried the **mahout** and the warriors. At times, the box was perforated to allow the archers inside to shoot their arrows.

**Inam** Literal meaning: reward; this term refers to a hereditary grant of land made by the Muslim rulers to both their Hindu and Muslim service elites as a reward for special service or display of merit

**Jaladurga** Water fort, i.e., a fort surrounded by water. It means a fort situated in a lake or lagoon or protected by wide, deep wet ditches.

**Janapada** An inhabited settlement; a region full of people who practice agriculture, trade and commerce and yield revenue

**Jihad** Islamic holy war against the infidels

**Jizya** A discriminatory poll tax that the Hindus had to pay to the Muslim ruler in return for security under the Muslim regime

**Kalaba** Serious struggle, tension, etc. that might escalate to war

**Kalinga** Ancient name for Orissa

**Kama** Desire, love and sex

**Kamboja** Kandahar and this region were considered famous by the **acharyas** for their horses

**Kamrup** Pre-modern name of Assam

**Karma** Action/activities in life; the classical Hindus accepted the **karma** theory, which means circle of births. One's activities, good or bad, determine the nature of rebirths.

**Kavya** Poem

**Khanda** Straight sword suited for slashing used by the Rajputs

**Kliba** Impotent, useless, cowardly, worthless, lacking **paurusha**; the term often refers to a ruler who fails to offer security to his subjects, hence he lacks dignity and honour and is unfit to rule

**Kopa** Internal rebellion, insurgency, popular uprising of subjects against an unjust ruler

**Kosa** Royal treasury

**Koti** Special units deployed at the outer flanks of an army deployed for battle

**Kufr** Also known as **kafir**, meaning infidel, unbeliever

**Kuta** Crookedness, evil genius; a component of **kutayuddha**

**Kutayuddha** Realpolitik is an essential component of **kutayuddha**. **Kutayuddha** is the opposite of **dhranyuddha**. The basic assumption is that in war everything is free and fair. **Kutayuddha** is waged by
Glossary

a powerful king for no valid reason, but just for the sake of power. Kutayuddha is also waged by a weaker king when faced with a strong adversary against whom he cannot wage prakasyuddha. The conduct of kutayuddha is free from moral or ethical restraints. The techniques of kutayuddha involve covert actions, commando raids, assassination, abduction, terrorist activities, guile, treachery, bheda, misinformation, disinformation, biological warfare (use of poison, smoke, etc.), nocturnal attacks, ambushes, tactical retreat and flank attacks. One component of kutayuddha is mantrayuddha, which involves diplomatic coercion, deceit, etc. An extreme form of kutayuddha is asrayuddha, which means execution of the defeated king and absorption of his territory by the victor.

Labha Literal meaning: greed; it means acquisition of things not one’s own

Lashkar-i-Islam Army of Islam

Lok Sabha Lower house of the Indian Parliament, which makes laws

Madhyama Middle kingdom in the mandala. The attitude of the ruler of this kingdom is crucial for the vijigishu’s strategy. If madhyama becomes neutral, then it would aid the vijigishu, but if the madhyama turns against the vijigishu, then the latter’s plan to become the hegemon of the mandala would be unsuccessful.

Magadha Traditional name of central Bihar

Mahajanapada Big localities inhabited by people; the precursor of the state

Mahout Elephant driver

Mandala The circle of the state system. The term denotes the classical Hindu conception of the inter-state system. The classical Hindu scholars conceptualized the international state system as circular (like a wheel), with the vijigishu’s state located at the centre of the circle and surrounded by allies and enemy states.

Mansa The term signifies a rank in the Mughal bureaucracy

Mansabdar Holder of a mansab; a Mughal imperial official

Mantri Minister, a crucial component (prakriti) of the polity

Matsanya Literal meaning: a pond where smaller fishes are gobbled up by a big fish; this term refers to an intense power struggle in the international arena where, in accordance with the principle of ‘might is right’, the weaker polities are absorbed by the stronger polity

Maula Regular soldiers of the standing army; at times the military service among them became hereditary

Mitra Troops of an ally; at times also refers to a state in the mandala that is friendly to the vijigishu
Glossary

Mlechchas Literal meaning: unclean, and in the eyes of the orthodox Hindu intellectuals the term refers to the ‘barbarians’; this term was used to denote non-Hindu foreigners like the Sakas, Parthians and Huns who entered India between the beginning of the Common Era and the sixth century CE through the north-west frontier passes

Moksa Salvation/liberation; breaking free from the cycle of births as propounded in the karma theory

Mujahideen Jihadi, soldier of Islam who is ready to sacrifice his life in order to kill the infidels and further the cause of Islam

Namak Halali Namak means salt, and halali means loyalty; the term means loyalty to the salt-giver, i.e., employer

Nawab After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal provincial governors became independent and took the title of nawab

Nayaka Vassal chief turned military commander of the king’s army; a nayaka is a semi-autonomous warlord

Palana Protection and maintenance of subjects in order to ensure sustained growth; an essential function of a just ruler

Panchhazari mansabdar A mansabdar holding a 5,000 mansab, meaning he was under the obligation of maintaining 5,000 cavalry soldiers for service with the emperor

Panchsheel Literal meaning: five principles; it refers to the five principles of Jawaharlal Nehru’s foreign policy, which emphasized peace and amity with neighbours

Patti Foot soldier of ancient India

Paurusha Manliness, an important aspect of a just ruler; it also involves the sexual prowess of the ruler. Paurusha is a symbolic component of danda.

Prakriti Kopa Internal rebellion that occurs due to malfunctioning of one or more of the components of the state

Raj Literal meaning: rule; the term refers to the British government of India between 1750 and 1947

Rajadharma Duties of the raja, i.e., ruler. It is somewhat similar to danadaniti as practiced by a just ruler.

Rajan Leader of the tribe in the early Vedic age and later became rajanripati, i.e., monarch

Rajukas Mauryan government officials

Raksas Literal meaning: demons; in the ancient period, the term referred to the non-Aryan, most probably Dravidian, people of the subcontinent. During the medieval era, the term referred to the Muslim invaders.

Raksha Protection of the subjects; it is the caste duty of the Kshatriyas/ Rajputs and an essential function of rajadharna
Ramrajya Literal meaning: kingdom of Rama where milk and honey flowed; actually it is a metaphor for good governance, i.e., a country with a just government that takes care of the people, who have to pay very low taxes

Rashtra State/polity, i.e., mostly a monarchical state

Ratha Chariot

Rathin Warrior on the chariot

Sadhu Hindu holy man engaged in worshiping the gods and goddesses

Saktism Worship of the feminine principle of sakti (absolute power) in Hinduism

Samanta Hindu feudal lord of early medieval India

Samantaraja Warden of the marches/tributary or vassal chieftain at the frontier

Sandhi Alliance for peacemaking or to avert war; occasionally it involves appeasement of the stronger party by the weaker party

Saptanga According to classical Hindu theory, a state comprising seven elements (prakriti): monarch, ministers, territory and people, fort, army, allies and the treasury

Sarvapath sambhav A key tenet of Hinduism; it means that all the paths/religions lead to the same goal, i.e., God

Sastra Sacred system of knowledge; also refers to brahmanical customs and laws

Sastrasala Arms production centre (factory/workshop) in ancient India

Sataggni Literal meaning: hundred killer; it was a sort of stone-throwing machine that was used during siege operations. It is probably a sort of catapult/ballista.

Satyagraha Love force or truth force based on ahimsa; in M. K. Gandhi’s eyes, it is a just instrument for achieving swaraj

Sena Army, also referred to as vahini

Senapati Commander of the sena, i.e., general of the army

Seniya One who possesses a sena

Shanti Peace, the opposite of ashanti, which means disorder, chaos

Sibh Strategic power

Shuddhi Purification rituals to bring the unclean (non-Hindus) into the fold of Hinduism

Sindhu River Indus

Sreni Mercenary soldiers belonging to the private guilds and trading corporations; in general, the duty of the sreni was to protect the trading centres, commercial routes and caravans. But during emergencies, the rulers also hired them.
Srenibala Military levies provided by the guilds
Suba/Subah Mughal province administered by a subadar (provincial governor). Independent subadar took the title of nawab.
Suta Driver of the chariot
Swaraj Self-rule, independence
Tamraparni West Bengal
Tanzeem Islamic militant outfits operating in Kashmir
Tapas/Tapasya Ascetic practice involving yoga for gaining spiritual and mental power. Such ascetic practice, including meditation, results in increasing the power of concentration and some believe results in acquiring supernatural power.
Trivarga Three objectives of life: dharma, artha and kama
Turangas Equivalent to mlechchas; the term Turangas is applied to all the non-Hindu groups along north-west India including the Huns, Sakas, Parthians and even the Persians
Uchchhvasa Chapter
Udasa A polity in the mandala that is neutral towards the vijigishu
Upayas Various means or mechanisms or different techniques; at times the term also refers to different policies
Ura Centre of the army deployed on a battlefield
Vahini Equivalent to sena, i.e., an army
Vahlika Bactria; a region considered by the acharya s to be famous for its supply of horses
Varna Caste; an order in the traditional Hindu system
Vigraha Inter-state war
Vijigishu The ideal ruler, the would-be hegemon of the mandala system
Vishakanyas Vish means poison, and kanyas means young ladies; the term vishakanyas refers to high-class prostitutes (scarlet women) who functioned as spies. They were educated and experts in dancing and singing. In other words, they had the skills to operate in elite society. They acquired information from their powerful clients while making love. At times, they also functioned as secret assassins. They would murder their powerful clients by administering poison in their food and drink.
Vyasa Calamities that can occur in a state; these calamities could be caused by either human or divine factors (beyond human control, natural calamities such as flood, famine)
Vyuha Literal meaning: array; it means deployment or formation of troops in a specified manner. It is somewhat equivalent to the modern order of battle, i.e., ORBAT.
Glossary

Yajna  Also known as yagna; it is a vedic ritual conducted by the Brahmins. This ritual involved the use of ghee (clarified butter) for lighting the fire and sacrificing an animal (probably a horse).

Yantra  Literal meaning: machine; for the acharyas the term refers to siege machine like a sataghni.

Yavanas  The Ionians, i.e., Greeks; the Bactrian Greeks who invaded India during the Common Era and settled on the subcontinent are called Indo-Greeks by historians. The ancient Hindu intellectuals called them yavanas; they were also considered mlechhas.

Yogis  Hindu ascetic monks who were experts in practicing yoga and had renounced the world.

Yuddha  Inter-state war, i.e., conventional warfare.