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978-1-107-01736-8 - Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia: From Antiquity to the Present

Kaushik Roy

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Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia

From Antiquity to the Present

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 *dharmayuddha* (just war) and *kutayuddha* (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.

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KAUSHIK ROY

*Jadavpur University, Kolkata
Peace Research Institute, Oslo*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107017368

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First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Roy, Kaushik, 1971–

Hinduism and the ethics of warfare in South Asia : from antiquity to the present / Kaushik Roy.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01736-8 (hardback)

1. Military art and science – India – Philosophy – History. 2. Military ethics – India – History. 3. Hindu ethics – India – History. I. Title.

U2I.2.R68 2012

172'.420954–dc23 2011049734

ISBN 978-1-107-01736-8 Hardback

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Preface

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

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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

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| BJP | Bharatiya Janata Party, i.e., the right-wing Hindu party of independent India |
| COIN | Counter-insurgency |
| CTBT | Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty |
| EIC | East India Company |
| EWJN | <i>The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru</i> , ed. by S. Gopal and Uma Iyengar, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003) |
| EWMG | <i>The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi</i> , ed. by Raghavan Iyer (1993; reprint, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007) |
| HUMINT | Human intelligence, e.g., spies, undercover agents |
| IESHR | <i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i> |
| INA | Indian National Army or the <i>Azad Hind Fauj</i> |
| INC | Indian National Congress |
| IOR, BL | India Office Records, British Library, London |
| IPKF | Indian Peace Keeping Force deployed in Sri Lanka in the 1980s |
| JME | <i>Journal of Military Ethics</i> |
| JMH | <i>Journal of Military History</i> |
| JSS | <i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i> |
| LOC | Line of Control, i.e., the boundary between India and Pakistan, especially in the disputed region of Kashmir |
| LTTE | Liberation Tigers of Tami Ealam (homeland) |
| MAS | <i>Modern Asian Studies</i> |

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| MD | <i>Manava Dharmasastra</i> |
| M/F | Microfilm Collection |
| MODAR | <i>Ministry of Defence Government of India Annual Report</i> |
| NAI | National Archives of India, New Delhi |
| NPT | Non-Proliferation Treaty |
| POW | Prisoner of war |
| SIGINT | Signal Intelligence, e.g., the use of satellites |

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Glossary

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*.

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*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*Bheda* 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/Chaturangabalam* 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*

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.

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

Howdah 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

Kalaha 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 *dharmayuddha*. The basic assumption is that in war everything is free and fair. *Kutayuddha* is waged by

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 *prakasayuddha*. 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 *asurayuddha*, 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.

Mansab 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*

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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 *dandaniti* as practiced by a just ruler.

Rajan Leader of the tribe in the early Vedic age and later became *raj/nripati*, 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 *rajadharma*

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- 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 worshipping 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
- Sarvath 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
- Sataghni* 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
- Shih* 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.

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*Glossary**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*Udasina* 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 *acharyas* 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.*Vyasanas* 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.

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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 *mlechchas*.

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

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