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## THE PACIFISTIC READING OF THE MAHABHARATA

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## ABSTRACT

This research article is an attempt to explore the pacifistic side of analysis in the events of stories in the great Hindu epic the Mahabharata. The epic is thought to be a complete package of knowledge that starts from the eternal religious culture to the present-day world of science and technology. As it is said that whatever exists in the Mahabharata exists everywhere in the world; and whatever doesn't exist in the epic does not exist anywhere in the world, the book talks about every aspect of human life including pacifism as well. It is the equally focused philosophical theory in the epic is the Mahabharata, but this idea hasn't been discussed much as far as the interpretation of the epic is concerned. Pacifism is the theory that prioritizes peaceful relations in human actions and attitudes. It believes that all forms of violence, war, or killing are unconditionally wrong. This paper tries to highlight some of the major events and characters that focus on peace and nonviolence in the stories inside the epic. Pacifism is the opposite of all kinds of brutal and violent attitudes of human beings. It appeals for a kind and cooperative treatment which is the key to success and prosperity. The English translated version of Vyasa's Mahabharata has been used for the theoretical analysis in the research paper, which concludes that the great Hindu epic has equally stressed the pacifistic approaches for solving out the human problems.

**Keywords:** ahimsa, Bhishma-Pratigya, celibacy, dharma, exile, incognito, non-violence, pacifism

## Introduction

French peace campaigner Emile Arnaud (1864-1921) was the first person to coin the term "pacifism", which is anti-war, anti-militarism, and anti-violent in its very fundamental nature. The 10<sup>th</sup> Glasgow Universal Peace Congress held in 1901, seems to have assimilated the term pacifism in the initiation of some peace activists. It is equivalent to the Sanskrit term ahimsa, meaning not to harm others (Bolin). Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as Jainism, take ahimsa/pacifism as their central religious philosophy. It is Leo Tolstoy's book *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* that brought a new starting interest in pacifism. Mahatma Gandhi's (1869-1948) 'satyagraha', or nonviolent as well as peaceful steadfast was another new expansion of pacifism. According to Barua (122), Gandhi's pragmatic and down-to-earth approach to life allowed him to understand the hard realities of life, that evil is very much there, part and parcel of goodness, that *himsa* is also an avoidable part of *ahimsa*. Further, Barua mentions Gandhi to have opined non-violence "as the only antidote to evil, the only precious

thing an atomic bomb cannot destroy" (131). Similarly, Martin Luther King Junior's peaceful and non-violent movement in America was another milestone in the spreading of pacifism. The idea of pacifism got new importance because of the American civil rights movement led by James Lawson, Charles Beard, James Bevel, etc.

Vyasa's Sanskrit version of the Mahabharata the root source of all versions of The Mahabharata. It is believed to have been composed in the 4th century BCE or earlier. Traditionally, the authorship of the Mahābhārata goes to Krishna- Dwaipayana Vyāsa. The epic is a complete package of knowledge, and wisdom of practical life. So, it has been studied from several perspectives so far. The epic has its prestigious place in the field of religion, politics, philosophy, and world literature too. The story of The Mahabharata has been shown and interpreted into several television serials; it has been enacted on the stages many times in different languages throughout the world, but the great Hindu epic has been much popular like that of the Ramayana in India, Srilanka, and Nepal. The story of the Mahabharata is not only of a religious type but it also has the stories of the modern type including the people of general to ruling classes; more significantly it has the guidance of the deities like Krishna himself. The intimate company and direct guidance to human beings through the divine form have not been mentioned elsewhere except that of Krishna's role in the Mahabharata times in the Dwapara Yuga. Krishan himself was a romantic figure and peace lover by nature. Fighting and using force was always his last option. He has given more importance to peace and nonviolence in all of the difficult situations both in the case of settling the matter between Kauravas and Pandavas and establishing peace and harmony in the country Mathura also where his maternal uncle Kansha ruled more cruelly. The story of the Mahabharata is not only the story of fierce fighting between Arjun and Karna, Duryodhana and Bhima, Bhisma and Parashuram, etc. but at the same time, it has stressed so much the necessity of pacifism, peace and nonviolence, and cooperation that is the ultimate destiny of every kind of fighting. Lord Krishna himself "has acted as a messenger of peace and mediator" (Shogimen and Spencer 50). All the possible attempts for avoiding the war had been made in the Mahabharata from various characters since "pacifism is the alternative to just war theory; it is fundamentally opposed to war unconditionally and absolutely" (Ryan).

Mahabharata, the term itself is connotative of some kind of conflict to most of the South Asian people. It is thought to be the story of warfare, conspiracy, political strategies, gambling, the struggle for power, and the role of Krishna - the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as per Hindu religion. He's shown to have been inspiring Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers to fight. But Krishna's inspiration to Arjuna for fighting was not the first choice he suggested, it was the last option left so that his purpose of maintaining good governance, peace, and the dharma could be established on the earth. It is nobody but Krishna who advocated so much to avoid the possible war between the Kauravas and Pandavas. He did apply and suggested all possible ways of avoiding the war; which was prone to cause huge damage to the people in the Bharata Varsha. It is Krishna who initiated bringing Kauravas and Pandavas into a peaceful agreement. He was almost successful in convincing all of the vital characters for agreeing to the peace resolution except the eldest of the Kauravas – Duryodhana, who was backed up by his maternal uncle Sakuni and his brave friend Karna. Before the war of Kurukshetra, Krishan goes to the palace of King Dhritarashtra and appeals for the same in the assembly of the king in the presence of dignitaries like Bhisma, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, Bidur, etc that the best solution for avoiding the possible war is the peace agreement between the Kauravas and Pandavas. As a Shanti doot i.e. peace agent, Krishana appeals to the king to return Indraprashta to Pandavas. He reminds the king that the king must give justice to all in his country. The giving of justice, Krishna says, will bring a peaceful environment to the country. This is a clear indication that Krishna wanted peace and nonviolence rather than the most devastating war to take place in front of him. King Dhristarashta and most of the dignitaries agreed to the peace proposal of Krishna, it was Duryodhana who didn't let his father declare the peace agreement between the two groups of brothers. Even then Krishna does not give up his hope for peace and further proposes that handing over only five villages to the Pandavas will escape the possibility of the war. This proposal is instantly Ok'd by the rest of the dignitaries but again Duryodhana rejects it outrightly and says that he would not give them even the land equaling the size of a piercing pin. The war of Mahabharata at Kurukshetra starts only after this rejection of Krishna's peace treaty by Duryodhana, but even after that many minor incidents are stressed to be held peacefully even during the war. The war would take

place only during the daytime, and they would rest peacefully at night in their camps. In the beginning days of the war, it was so much disciplined that it looked like a tournament competition. Christopher Isherwood in his book *Bhagavad-gita: The Song Of God* mentions the same idea of pacifism in the Mahabharata:

In the first place, it is sometimes said that the battle of Kurukshetra cannot possibly be compared to a battle in modern war. It was, in fact, a kind of tournament, governed by all the complex and human rules of ancient chivalry. A soldier mounted upon an elephant may not attack a foot soldier. No man may be struck or shot at while running away. No one may be killed who has lost his weapons. And we are told in the Mahabharata, that the opposite armies stopped fighting every evening, and even visited each other and fraternized during the night (35).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Sanskrit version of the Mahabharata by Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa is the authentic epic that was composed between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. By today's date, it has been translated into many languages of the world. Various interpretations and analyses have been made so far. Most of the interpretations and readings of the epic have portrayed the epic as the book that revolves around the theme of complicated politics, religions, dharma- karma, war, violence, and such many truculent themes. Why is the Mahabharata primarily looked at from hostile eyes only? Why has the theme of pacifism not been discussed significantly? What is the role of nonviolent philosophy in the epic itself?

### **Hypothesis**

The great Hindu epic the Mahabharata equally gives importance to the philosophy of pacifism right from the beginning to the end. The epic presents peace and non-violence as the fundamental things of human life. War or any kind of violence is never the first option to be adopted in human life. The epic presents a pacifistic approach to life to be more prosperous than the life that relies on violence and hostility. Pacifism has its roots in righteousness and *kshama* or the excuse.

### **The Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to explore the pacifistic side of analysis in the events of stories in the great Hindu epic. The study also aims at looking at the role of non-violent and peaceful actions performed by various characters on different occasions because of which the Mahabharata is considered to be the storehouse of the holistic knowledge of the word. The study, at the same time, also aims at changing people's perception about the Mahabharata that the epic should not be taken only as a collection of stories on war, treachery, plots, killing, and bloodsheds but it has equally talked about the benefits and necessity of pacifistic style of life.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research paper covers the events and characters that are in some way engaged to the pacifistic aspect in the story of the Mahabharata. There are several versions of translations into English of the epic from its originally written text in Sanskrit by Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa. This research is primarily dependent on Kisari Mohan Ganguli's translation of Vyasa's Mahabharata that he wrote in Sanskrit between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE.

### **Methodology**

While applying the pacifistic study of the Mahabharata, the translated version into English of the Mahabharata by Krishan- Dwaipayan Vyasa has been used as the primary source of research data. Since it's the longest epic of the world literature, it was not possible to go through the text in detail in each of the Parvas mentioned; rather focus was given on only those Parvas and incidents in which the issue of pacifism could be discussed for the research. As the secondary source of data, various views, and comments by different scholars and writers on the issue related to the topic has been studied and analyzed to conclude the research paper. The research is dependent on both online and offline materials.

### **Review of Literature**

Devavrata was the son of Ganga and Shantanu. He was to inherit the crown as per the royal provision in the AdiParva of the Mahabharata. He had been declared the crown of Hastinapura also but King Shantanu happens to fall in love with Satyavati with whom he wanted to marry. She was ready to marry the king provided that their would-be son would inherit the throne. The condition was much painful to the king for he couldn't do any injustice to his son Devavrata. Upon understanding his father's anxiety, Devavrata promised that he would remain unmarried throughout his life and would not become the king. After this promise Devavrata was known as Bhishma. The promise was known as the BhishmaPratigya. This very act of BhishmaPratigya was itself an act of pacifism that Bhishma made so that peace could prevail in the palace and in the heart of the king as well. Hadn't he understood his father's will to marry Satyavati, the father-son relationship might not go smoothly. The king could have given words to her without talking to Devavrata and if Devavrata wouldn't have made *BhishmaPratigya* or fierce oath there was plenty of chances that the internal conflict in the palace would begin that might turn towards some kinds of violence as well for doing conspiracies in the palace for power is quite a common thing to occur. So the BhishmaPratigya was an act of pacifism at least for one generation in Hastinapura. Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English prose translation of the *Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* from the original Sanskrit text mentions Devavrata's peaceful initiation of settling his father marriage with Satyavati:

"Vaisampayana continued, 'O thou of Bharata's race, Devavrata, having heard these words, and moved by the desire of benefiting his father thus answered in the hearing of the assembled chiefs, 'O foremost of truthful men, listen to the vow I utter! The man has not been or will not be born, who will have the courage to take such a vow! I shall accomplish all that thou demandest! The son that may be born of this maiden shall be our king.'" Vaisampayana continued, 'O king, the son of Ganga, devoted to truth, having ascertained the scruples of the chief of the fishermen, then said, moved thereto by the desire of benefiting his father, 'Chief of fishermen, thou best of men, listen to what I say in the presence of these assembled kings. Ye kings, I have already relinquished my right to the throne, I shall now settle the matter of my children. O fisherman, from this day I adopt the vow of *Brahmacharya*(study and meditation in celibacy). If I die sonless, I shall yet attain to regions of perennial bliss in heaven!'(p. 218).

In the same context of the Sambhava Parva, Ganguli mentions that after getting such words of promise from brave Devavrata, Satyavati's father gives his consent for his daughter's marriage with Shantanu. Everyone is overjoyed there; the tension regarding the marriage of the king ends peacefully:

"Vaisampayana continued, 'Upon these words of the son of Ganga, the hair on the fisherman's body stood on end from glee, and he replied, 'I bestow my daughter!' Immediately after, the *Apsaras* and the gods with diverse tribes of *Rishis* began to rain down flowers from the firmament upon the head of Devavrata and exclaimed, 'This one is *Bhishma*(the terrible).' Bhishma then, to serve his father, addressed the illustrious damsel and said, 'O mother, ascend this chariot, and let us go unto our house.'(p. 218).

In the *Adi Parva* of the Mahabharata, Bhisma abducts the three princesses of Kashi- Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika for his brother Vichitravirya to get married. Ambika and Ambalika easily give their consent for the marriage but Amba rejects to marry the king saying that she was already in love with Salva, the king of Saubala. Knowing this, Bhisma regrets her abduction and sends her back to Salva, who rejects her saying that it was against the Kshetriya Dharma. Bhisma had abducted the princess getting violent by using his *astras* or weapon for his brothers' marriage but he turns pacifist as he decides to send Amba back because "pacifism can even arise within a pervasively warist context" (Cady 1-2). Amba is then rejected by Vichitravirya too. Amba asks Bhishma to marry her because it is Bhishma himself, who is responsible for all this misfortune; but he mentions his vow of celibacy. Then the distraught Amba is suggested to Parashuram for the solution to her problem. Parashuram tells Bhisma either to marry Amba or to fight with him. Bhishma again mentions his celibacy, so that, he says he can't marry anyone and he can't fight with Parashuram because he was his preceptor. When Parashuram orders him as a guru to fight with him, Bhishma says that he will just stop his attack but not attack him from his side. Bhishma in this context turns pacifist, and acts of fighting with Parashuram just to keep his word. Though the war continues for 24 days, Bhishma doesn't let it turn devastating to other creatures. Finally, the war between them is pushed into a draw by divine sage Narada and other gods. The war reached a draw in

the peaceful moods of the two opponents and the interference of the divine party is undoubtedly an act of pacifism because the possible devastations were stopped from taking place. *MahabharataOnline.com* describes how the devastating fight-scenario for keeping the words takes a peaceful twist:

On the 23<sup>rd</sup>day, when Bhishma took the weapon given by his pitru's, a divine voice spoke to him asking not to use the weapon and insult his guru Parasurama and it told Parasurama that he cannot win over Bhishma in the war. But Parasurama said that he cannot go back from the war when Bhishma is still standing against him on the battlefield. Bhishma in respect of his teacher walked away from the combat and allowed a graceful exit for Parasurama.

In much of the interpretations of Dhritarashtra's character, he is portrayed as someone who didn't do anything significant to stop Duryodhana from doing mischievous works that fundamentally invited the war of Mahabharata. But looking at Dhritarashtra's beginning years of teenage, he could also be taken as a pacifist. He was born blind as a son to Ambika who was impregnated by Vyasa through Niyoga practice. When the time came to declare the heir of Hastinapura, it was suggested that Pandu, his younger brother would be a better fit because the eldest son was a blind candidate. As a knowledgeable son Dhritarashtra willingly conceded the crown to his brother Pandu. Dhritarashtra was denied the crown saying that he was a blind man and thus couldn't be the king. But he could have objected to this practice because he was the eldest son in the palace. He could have broken the peaceful environment if he had revolted against the tendency of making kings to the persons who mandatorily had to physically fit from every possible angle. His only weakness was his blindness; otherwise, he was far healthier and stronger than his brother. Talking about people's biased concept on physical impairment AnuVensila writes:

Disability is often perceived as the external manifestation of an individual's implicit character flaws or as the punishment for their sins. This view marginalizes the disabled persons and forces them into social reclusiveness. Interpreting Dhritarashtra's personality through the lens of disability studies may favor the understanding of the character as one of the crucial components churned out by the cycle of violence in the textual world of *Mahabharata*. Dhritarashtra's flaws could be considered as the resultant effect of the social norms which characterized his impairment as disability, thereby denying him the throne.

The relationship between the Pandavas and the Kauravas was not satisfactory from their childhood. The sense of enmity can be seen clearly in the actions of Duryodhana and Bhima. But their seniors would ask them to be friendly to each other with the hope that they could progress only if they were pacifists in their actions. The eldest of the Pandava brothers Yudhishthira would always teach his brothers especially Bhima to be calm and kind-hearted to all the Kaurava brothers. He would always ask his Pandava brothers to give the excuse or Kshama. *Kshama hi Dharma Hai*, he would always teach his brothers this philosophical knowledge. Yudhishthira is the most righteous character in the Mahabharata who would believe in actions that included peace and non-violence. He had a strong belief in *Ahimsa Paramo Dharma* i.e. non-violence is the highest moral value. About the importance and value of ahimsa or non-violence, *Mahaprasthanika Parva* in the Mahabharata has mentioned the following verse:

Ahimsa is the highest Dharma, Ahimsa is the highest self-control,  
 Ahimsa is the greatest gift, Ahimsa is the best practice,  
 Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice, Ahimsa is the finest strength,  
 Ahimsa is the greatest friend, Ahimsa is the greatest happiness,  
 Ahimsa is the highest truth, and Ahimsa is the greatest teaching

The most notorious event described in the Mahabharata is the gambling between Pandavas and Kauravas played in the presence of most of the dignitaries of Hastinapura. Though the game of dice was not fairly played, Pandavas lost everything they possessed. In the same foul game, Kaurava's tried removing the clothes of Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas who had to go to exile for 12 years. Pandavas' acceptance of going to exile is an act of nonviolence. It was a peaceful exit, had they not done so, violence was sure to happen right then. Had Krishna not used his divine power to save Draupadi's prestige, the situation would have turned terrific. Both sides would not hesitate to use their destructive weapons against each other. This particular situation seems to

have been managed in a non-violent way. Upon losing everything in the game of dice and before going to the exile in the jungle, Bhimasena, Arjuna, Nakula as well as Sahadeva make some kind of agitated remarks but Yudhishthira remains calm and address the dignitaries present in the event of DyutKrida:

Yudhishtira said,--'I bid farewell unto all the Bharatas, unto my old grand-sire (Bhishma), king Somadatta, the great king Vahlika, Drona, Kripa, all the other kings, Aswathaman, Vidura, Dhritarashtra, all the sons of Dhritarashtra, Yayutsu, Sanjaya, and all the courtiers, I bid farewell, all of ye and returning I shall see you."( Sabha Parva p.150).

Overcome with shame none of those that were present there, could tell Yudhishtira anything. Within their hearts, however, they prayed for the welfare of that intelligent prince. But Vidura comes forward and blesses Pandavas to be safe in their exile. The Pandavas then reply to him politely:

"O sinless one, let it be as thou sayest. Thou art our uncle, and, therefore like our father. We also are all obedient to thee. Thou art, O learned one, our most respected superior. We should always obey what thou choosest to command. And, O high-souled one, order thou whatever else there is that remaineth to be done."(SabhaParva p.150).

The Pandavas go to exile for the fixed 12 years and as per the condition of the gambling, and one more year had to be spent on incognito to avoid the repetition of the same period to be spent. During this period all of them maintain peace and nonviolence in their lives on almost all occasions under the disciplined guidance of Yudhishtira. They knew that the war between them and the Kauravas was most likely to occur, that's why they prepared themselves for it too. Arjuna spent most of his time in penance intending to get victorious if the war would take place.

Yudhishtira's peaceful and non-violent attitude is the same also with Jayadratha who had abducted Draupadi. When Bhima brings Jayadratha in chains, with his hair cropped as a mark of servitude to the Pandavas, Yudhishtira sets him free. He tells Jayadratha, 'Thou art a free man now. I emancipate thee. Now go away and be careful not to do such a thing again' (Mahabharata, 3.272.21). One can see that Yudhishtira bestows his protection even on those who had inflicted serious harm to himself and his family. Thus, he displays the magnanimity of his nature. The eldest of the Pandava brothers Yudhishtira always tried to maintain peace, non-violence, and basic human dharma even in the most difficult times of his life. "During the latter part of their exile in the forest, Yudhishtira has a dream (Mahabharata, 3.258.2-9). He dreams that the deer of the Dwaita forest came to him and requested him to move to another part of the forest. The leader of the deer tells Yudhishtira in his dream that their species were becoming extinct as the Pandavas have been hunting these animals to maintain themselves and their retinue. In response to this dream, Yudhishtira decides to move to another part of the forest. This shows that he considered himself the protector not only of his subjects but also of the natural world that came under his rule"(Quest et al.).

They spent the 13th year of incognito in the service of the royal family of Virata, the king of Matsya, where all of the Pandavas including Draupadi spend the time secretly and peacefully. Despite some kinds of ill-treatment to them in the palace, they behave peacefully in response to the insulting treatment by the royal family of king Virata. The Pandavas in the disguised form are compelled to tolerate all these mistreatments for the sake of ethics of servants who might not turn violent to maintain peace primarily, so it is evident that "pacifism is more difficult to define in relation to ethics in that it does not begin so much as an ethical reply to the violence" (Cahill, 2). After Arjun defeats Kauravas including Pitamah, Drona, Kripacharya, Karna, etc, there is some misunderstanding to king Virata on how the fight was won actually, and he hits Yudhishtira with his dice and Yudhishtira bleeds from his face but remains calm. In the Virata Parva of the Mahabharata Book 4, Krishna Mohan Ganguli describes this scene by translating it into English:

"Vaisampayana continued, 'Saying this, the king inflamed with anger forcibly struck Yudhishtira in the face with dice, and reproached him angrily, saying, 'Let it not occur again! And having been violently struck, blood began to flow from his nose. But the son of Pritha held it in his hands before it fell on the ground. And the virtuous Yudhishtira then glanced at Draupadi who was standing by his side. Ever

obedient to the wishes of her lord, the faultless Draupadi, understanding his meaning, and bringing a golden vessel filled with water, received the blood that flowed from his nose"(Section LXVIIp.120).

Yudhishthira knows that his brother Arjuna won't tolerate his eldest brother to have been hurt like that so he immediately handles the situation peacefully as he gets information that Uttara (Virat's son) and Arjun (as Vrihannala) were coming there straight:

"Then Yudhishthira, the king of the Kurus, gently whispered unto the ears of the warder, 'Let Uttara enter alone; Vrihannala must not come in. Such is the vow of that hero of mighty arms that whoever causeth a wound on my person or sheddeth my blood except in battle, shall not live. Inflamed with rage he will never bear patiently to see me bleeding, but will slay Virata even now with his counselors and troops and steeds."(Section LXVIIp.120)

After the Pandavas complete their exile period, they demand half of the kingdom. They put forward their demand in quite a peaceful formal way. But even Kauravas refuse. The book of UdyogaParva includes the effort for peace that fails, followed by the effort to prepare for the great war—the Kurukshetra War. In the Sanjaya-yana Parva, Section 20-32 mentions that Drupada's envoy goes to Kauravas with the message that Pandavas do not want war because they see war as something that ruins the world, all they want is an amicable settlement. This proposal of peace on the side of Pandavas was of course an act of pacifism. The envoy delivers their message that Kauravas give virtue and peace a chance, they give back that which should be returned to Pandavas as per the *darma*. The envoy put the peace message of Pandavas:

"Ye best of Kuru's race, overlooking all these injuries of yore they desire nothing but a peaceful settlement with the Kurus! Remembering their behavior, and that of Duryodhana also, the latter's friends should entreat him to consent to peace! The heroic sons of Pandu are not eager for war with the Kurus. They desire to get back their share without involving the world in ruin. If Dhritarashtra's son assigns a reason in favor of war, that can never be a proper reason". (Unit XX p.33, UdyogaParva)

Bhishma responds that the peace proposal makes the sense. Duryodhana and his brothers reject the proposal. Karna also opposes the peace proposal and explains the power of himself and the Kauravas. This irritates Bhishma and Dhritarashtra interrupts Karna:

"Vaisampayana continued, 'Then Dhritarashtra pacified Bhishma with words of entreaty, rebuked the son of Radha, and spoke the following words, What Bhishma, Santanu's son, hath said is salutary for us, as also for the Pandavas, and likewise for the whole universe. I shall, however, after deliberation, send Sanjaya to the sons of Pandu. So thou needst not wait. Go thou to the son of Pandu this very day.' The Kaurava chief then honored Drupada's priest and sent him back to the Pandavas. (The Mahabharata, Book 5: UdyogaParva: Section XXI,p. 35)

By the order of Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya meets the Pandavas and stresses the necessity of maintaining peace, not war. Yudhishthira also focuses on peace and tells that they do not want war rather peace and prosperity but Kauravas had to return them Indraprastha- a kingdom they had to leave during their exile. In the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of the same Parva, Yudhishthira suggests that he would accept a smaller kingdom if that would prevent war. Sanjay returns with yet another dimension of a peace proposal from the Pandavas.

In the Bhagavat-yana Parva Krishna offers to be an envoy to peace to the Kauravas and leaves for their court. Dhritarashtra makes great preparation to welcome Krishna. Duryodhana himself makes preparations to please Krishna. Praising the Pandavas' kind acts and prowess and criticizing the Kurus' cowardness and inferiority he proposes peace between both parties:

".....Know that Yudhishthira always treadeth the path that is trodden by the righteous. Thou knowest also, O king, what the behavior of Yudhishthira is towards thee and thy sons. Although thou hadst sought to burn him to death and hadst exiled him from human habitation, yet he came back and once more repose confidence in thee. Again, didst thou with thy sons, banish him to Indraprastha? ..... Yudhishthira of immeasurable soul, did not yet swerve from the duties of a Kshatriya. As regards myself,

I desire, O Bharata, thy good as also theirs. For the sake of virtue, of profit, of happiness, make peace, O king, and do not allow the Earth's population to be slaughtered, regarding evil as good and good as evil. Restrain thy sons, O monarch, who have from covetousness proceeded too far. As regards the sons of Pritha, they are equally ready to wait upon thee in dutiful service or to fight. That which, O chastiser of foes, seems to thee to be for thy good, do thou adopt! (Bhagwat Yana Parva: Section XCV p. 199)

Dhritarashtra agrees with his proposal, but Duryodhana casting his eyes on Karna laughingly ignores it. All the bigwigs in the assembly ask him to accept the proposal, but even Duyodhan doesn't change. Both of his parents suggest him to agree with the peace agreement as proposed by Krishna but Duryodhana doesn't assimilate it; rather he orders his soldiers to seize Krishana instead. The Bhagavat-yana Parva symbolically describes the story of Garuda to emphasize that peace is better. After Duryodhana does not accept the peace agreement, Krishan then meets Karna and tells him everything about his life with the request that Karna should give up the company of Duryodhana so that the war could be avoided. But Karna, very humbly, tells Krishana that he cannot deceive Duryodhana at the moment because it was he, who stood by his side in the most difficult times of his life. Thus, every attempt for avoiding war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas fails and the war takes place at Kurukshetra, where Arjuna initially shows his disinterestedness in Killing his kith and kins but lord Krishna convinces him to fight for the victory of virtue/truth to bring peace and stability in the Bharata Barsha. In this sense, Krishna's appeal to Arjuna for fighting also seems an act of pacifism. Andrew Fiala opines the same thing in his book *Practical Pacifism*:

Practical Pacifism is not absolutely pacifism; it does not reject violence in all cases. Rather it develops out of the idea that sometimes war may be justified, even as it questions whether any given war is in fact a just one. The thesis of practical pacifism is that we should be reluctant to consent to war, in most cases. (1)

The war of the Mahabharata at Kurukshetra lasts for 18 days that kills billions of people. The Pandavas get victorious, all the Kauravas get killed. The great warrior like Karna, Bhisma, Dronacharya loses their life from the Kauravas side whereas young brave warriors Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun, Ghatotkach, the son of Bhima also gets killed in the war. So, in this sense, "it is a kind of failure of pacifistic approach" in the Mahabharata because "it has not eliminated war and violence from human life" (Howes). Dhritarashtra and Gandhari handover the throne to Yudhishtira before they go to live in the jungle voluntarily. They decide to pass the rest of their life peacefully. Dr. Shruti D Naik, in her article *Learnings and Managerial Implications from Comparative Analysis of Eminent Women in Mahabharata*, writes about the peace-loving nature of Gandhari – "Gandhari did not want the Kauravas and the Pandavas to fight amongst themselves but the attachment to her sons and husband might have held her back from taking a strong stand to prevent the Great War. After the war of Mahabharata, Gandhari was living with the Pandavas. Later, she had a feeling of renunciation so she went to jungles with Dhritrashtra and Kunti."

### **Conclusion**

The Mahabharata, one of the great Hindu epics needs to be observed not only from the traditional perspective that focuses on the conflict, treachery, fighting, violence on people's actions and thoughts; but an equally important aspect in it, is the endeavors for peace, tranquility, cooperation, non-violence and *Dharma* that have significantly taught the lesson of pacifism to its readers, listeners and spectators as well. The pacifistic approach of the vital characters in different times has stopped so many brutal clashes in the epic. This very approach has been connected with the righteousness of the characters. Peaceful solutions have always given better prosperity from the past to the present time. Devavrata's peaceful effort ended in the happy marriage of his father Shantanu and Satyavati. A son sacrifices his pleasure of possibly happily married life only because he can't see his father in the anxiety of the love of a beautiful woman. From that time Devavrata is called Bhisma due to his oath of remaining bachelor throughout his life. He also promises not to become the king but to safeguard the nation. This was possible for Bhisma to assimilate in his life due to his love and belief in peace and non-violence rather than in unnecessary clashes in the Kuru family. More or less most of the characters have realized the importance of pacifism in the story of the Mahabharata. Krishna, the Pandavas, Karna, Dhritarashtra,

Gandhari, Kunti, etc have stressed going for pacifistic approaches to the solution of the problem on various occasions. Krishna's peace proposal between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Balaram's (Krishna's elder brother) nonparticipation in the war, imposing of certain conditions while fighting in the war, obedience to the gurus and seniors by the juniors, etc are some of the examples of existence and importance of pacifistic strategies in the epic itself. during their, exile Yudhisthira responds to Yaksha peacefully in a calm mood and solves the problem that had almost finished off his brothers. The Adi Parva: 56:33 of the Mahabharata reads: "Yadihasti Tadanyatra Yannehasti Na tatkvachit (यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत्कचित्) meaning "That which exists in the Mahabharata exists everywhere in the world. That which is not in the Mahabharata does not exist anywhere else." So that the appeal for non-violence, peace, and friendliness undoubtedly exists in the Mahabharata. The Pacifistic approach of reading can be made based on the essence of the above-mentioned Shloka as well. Indeed, the Mahabharata, as Mishra says, is capable of comprising the holistic knowledge of the world; it's the storehouse of eternal culture too.

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