

## Triviality of Bharata War in *Kurukshetra The Graveyard*

Prof. P. KANNAN

Professor of English, KSAWU Bijapur

*The Mahabharata* is considered to be an Indian epic but also an Indian Dharma Sastra or the Scripture of Righteousness. *The Mahabharata* deals with the conflict and struggle between the cousins of two groups called the Kauravas and the Pandavas for the dynastic succession to the throne of Hastinapur. These cousins belong to the same family and grow together upto Gurukul but become rivals and enemies in sharing the kingdom. The foul and vengeance of Shakuni is responsible for the irresolvable dispute between them. Their dispute leads to the war at Kurushetra which destroys not only the cousins but also ruins Hastinapura. The episodes of Dronacharya, Bhishma, Eklavya, Karna, Draupati, Krishna and the whole Mahabharata represent and impart various values inscribed in the Hindu Dharmashastra or the Scripture of Righteousness. The Bharata war known as Kurushetra war is symbolically perceived to be war between Good and Evil; Honesty and Dishonesty; Moral and Immoral; Ethical and Unethical; Unselfishness and Selfishness; generosity and greed; and Dharma and adharma. Among the binaries, the Pandavas stand for the first and the Kauravas the second. It is said that the Mahabharata war took place in 3102 BCE. It was fought for eighteen days. Though it is stated that the Pandavas won the war destroying Duryodhana, the result of the war was the complete ruin and devastation of Hastinapura.

Though created by Ved Vysa, the *Mahabharata* has been widely rewritten in the form of adoption, adaptation, translation, There are two tendencies in the rewriting namely endorsement and subversion of the spirit of the original text. Kuvempu's *A Throat for a thumb*, Girish Karnad's *Yayati* and *The Fire and the Rain*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Citra Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* are some of the works recreated of *The Mahabharata*. In this paper, an attempt is made to establish that the Bharata War is trivial in Kuvempu's *Kurushetra the Graveyard*.

The Mahabharata is one of most outstanding epics and classics not only in Indian Literature but also in the World

Literature. The war in *The Mahabharata* like the war in the European epics is symbolic. It symbolizes the war between the Good and Evil in which the victory is achieved by the Good. Such a thought is considered to be grand and noble. Like Longinus's proposition, it is regarded as sublime as it embodies the grandeur of thought and expression. In other words, the Bharata war is ennobled and glorified. From the time immemorial, *The Mahabharata* and the Bharata war depicted in it have been unanimously accepted as a heroic and noble literature and noble event respectively.

However, the perception on war in general and on war in literature after the World War II has changed. The impact of war on the life, economy, infrastructure, peace was so severe, serious and lasting on the people of the whole world, the very of looking life changed drastically. Life was seen as being hopeless, chaotic, distressed, gloomy, cursed, devastated and horrible. The age-old perception on war in literature and in reality was changed from heroic to unheroic; noble to ignoble;

Anti-war was the subject of poetry, novel and drama of many nations after the WWII. Although India did not participate in WWI and WWII, India had experienced the evils of war during the Freedom Movement; Indo-China War; Indo-Pakistan War; and Kargil War. The attitude towards war as themes in literature and a real incident has changed among the people and creative writers in India. The progressive mind-set of the creative writers has revisited and reviewed the wars in *The Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. As a result, there are re-rendering of the epics in general and the so called values attached to various episodes in them. The Bharata War has been revisited and rewritten in *Kurushetra Graveyard* by Kuvempu from the perspective of the impact of the war.

*Kurushetra Graveyard* (1982) is an English translation of Kuvempu's *Masana Kurukshetra* (1944) by Dr. Prabhu Shankara. It is a ten scene play which deals with the imaginary picture of the last day of the Bharata war in Kurushetra. It is not only the end of the Bharata war but also

the end of a *yug* namely *Dwapara yug* and beginning of the next *yug* called *Kali yug*. In the first scene the deity *Dwapara* of the closing *yug* and the deity of new *yug* *Kali* meet in *Kurushetra*. While *Dwarapara* grieves and laments over the death of so many great men of *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* and is afraid of the end of such heroes, *Kali* is optimistic that such people shall be born in the new age also. He makes a point that destruction and creation revolve around each other cyclically. Yet towards the end of the scene, the ugliness of the war in the words of *Dwapara*:

*Dwapara* – This is the reward of the martial spirit  
Of heroic warriors reap! Look! This is the graveyard  
That has sprung from the valour  
Of mighty warriors, frenzied with fighting spirit!  
And this is the site of great conflagration  
That has sprung from the *Kurukshetra*  
Of *Mahabharata*, from the fighting of the heroes  
And from their famous victory..  
This is the mortuary of corpses;  
This is the domain of nocturnal spectres! [Scene 1, 73]

In the second two sets of characters are presented. They are described as the servants who have come to *Kurukshetra* in search of their master who has fought in the war. There are three characters in the first set on another part of *Kurukshetra*. The description of the scene itself reveals that it is full of misery and tragedy. They are in *Kurukshetra* which has turned out to be a graveyard of the dead and dying soldiers and their masters. All three of them. Besides their reminiscence of their master's generosity, the fearsome atmosphere of the *Kurukshetra* which is a graveyard rather than a war field now is evinced in their conversation like this:

*Chanura* – Stepping upon the arrow-points at every step, I have got both my feet torn to tatters. What a battlefield! It is the ground indeed of a mass massacre.  
*Nilaksha* – Until today I never knew that a battlefield could be so terrible.

This graveyard, the result of the conclusion of the war, has assumed a far more terrible look than it wore during the fighting, Hasn't it?

*Girvana* – Today I realized the havoc and the destruction caused by the war. [Scene 2, 75]

The next set is of mother and child. Mother has come to *Kurukshetra* in search of her husband who was in the war.

Mother tells her child that she is there in search of her father which child is unable to understand properly. On seeing a corpse, the child mistakes that a man is sleeping there and when the child asks mother as why he is sleeping there, mother's painful dilemma in which the evil of war is exhibited is presented thus:

*Mother* – (to herself) How can I explain what death is to this child who does not know what life is? How can I say, my dear, even heroes have no home in the battlefield? How can I say that he is but a stranger, when even in death, he is living in the company of death? (*to this child*) . This man who offered himself to the fire of war is now sleeping the sleep of death. He will not wake up again!

*Child* – What, won't he wake up again?

*Mother* – No, he won't.

*Child* - Won't he talk again?

*Mother* – No

*Child* – You said that he has a child like me. Won't he take him in his arms and play with him?

*Mother* – ...

He is now neither father nor husband, neither relative nor friend nor foe! He is now no one's elder or younger brother –

*Child* – (*with a start*) What else is he then Ma?

*Mother* – He is a corpse, a corpse, a dead rotting corpse of the graveyard! [Scene 2, 76-77]

In the third scene, again two sets of characters are used. There is a novelty in the characterization in this scene as two devils in the first set and *Krishna* in the second set are found. The characters of devils are created in order to show that war is more cruel, dangerous, horrible and gruesome than the devils who are generally the most dangerous and fearsome. There is a suggestion that human beings are more intolerant, jealous and cruel to another than the devils. They also explain that the defeat of *Duryodhana* is not a defeat and the victory of *Bhim* is not a victory. It is nothing but the madness of mankind to war with one another. About the evil of the *Bharata* war *Devil II* and *Devil I* say thus:

*Devil II* - ... how ghastly is this battle – field of *Kurukshetra*! Killing has assumed such a terrible form here that it is apt to turn even devils mad.

*Devil I* – Never before have I seen, in any past battle, either such heroism or such massacre.

Devil II – What monstrous envy, what mad lust for fighting these base human beings have! Even I detest them! [Scene 3, 78-79]

In the set, there are three characters i.e., Old Woman, Krishna and Vidura. Old woman has come to Kurukshetra in search of her son who brings the report about the war to her every day but has not turned out so far. Her son's name is Narayana. She checks corpse after corpse calling out to him simultaneously. She feels that the graveyard grows larger and is a murderous spot. It is rather Krishna who appears before her along with Vidura than her son. From her interaction Krishna, it is brought out that Narayana is a well known for his valour among the Pandavas as well as the Kauravas. Krishna shows Old Woman the direction to the place Narayana can be found.

In the ensuing dialogue between Krishna and Vidura, it is revealed that it is circumstances which are responsible for all happenings rather than the notions called virtue and vice. There is a redefinition of morality, truth, salvation, creation, the Vedas, the Sastras, mortality, immortality, sin, and sanctity. Krishna imparts the philosophy of life that all of us irrespective virtuous and vicious shall disappear after the life over. The life of soldiers is also part of this philosophy.

The fourth scene is shifted to another location in Kurukshetra. Dhritarastra and Gandhari are seen in Kurukshetra where there is already Sanjaya who finds the night silent unusually like a corpse and the graveyard terrible. They seek the help to Sanjaya to trace their son before his death while Bhanumathi and her maid watch them following Sanjaya.

The place is changed in the fifth scene in which Dharmaraja, Bhima, Draupadi, Arjuna and Soldier appear. While Dharmaraja addresses to Vayu claim that it is his Dharma which has burnt the garden of Dwapara indicating the war in which the Kauravas are destroyed. When Bhima endorses it Arjun's intervention is very significant as it suggests the establishment of Dharma without a war which is illustrated as shown under:

Bhima – (*irately*) yes, indeed!

It is the garden of Adharma burnt up by Dharma:  
The rank growth of sin offered as oblation  
To the fire of virtue!

Arjuna – Why this prelude of a massacre  
For the establishment of *Dharma*?  
Cannot *Dharma* set foot on earth

Without bloodshed in war? [Scene 5, 86]

Bhima highlights the reality of good and evil. He explains that the dissolution comes on before the evolution is complete. He adds that while the path of preaching and heart requires numerous years, a single day is sufficient for the path of fight. The Bharata War has brought an end to the entire work of an era in just eighteen days. At this juncture, a voice is heard crying for water. When Dharmaraja instructs Arjun to fetch water, Bhima's reaction exposes another darker side of the war: Bhima – (even from the distance) Elder brother, ask him first who is, Whether he is of our side, or of the Kaurava's side! [Scene 5, 87]

Dharmaraja reminds Bhim that his attitude is ruthless at the time of death in the graveyard. It is against the principle of mercy. Bhima considers that the advice of Dharmaraja is hypocritical. If he is regarded as cruel now, his act of fighting with mace in the war should have been equally considered to cruel. To their surprise, the soldier who consumes water from Arjun belongs to the Kauravas repents for drinking from the Pandava member:

*Soldier* - Who are these? Pandavas?

Woe is me! At the very last moment I have sinned  
Against my Master, the Kaurava Emperor,  
By drinking the water given by the Pandavas!  
Forgive me, my master! Forgive me!  
(*dies*) [Scene 5, 88]

The next scene is placed on the bank of the Vaisampayana where Duriyodhana is found laying after being attacked deadly on his thigh by Bhima with his mace. There are eight characters in this scene namely Kauvara, Asvathama, Dwapara, Krishna, Sanjaya, Dhritarastra, Gandhari, and Bhanumati.

Asvathama meets Kauvarava who found lying seriously wounded in the duel with Bhima. It is almost the time of his death. Kauvarava expresses his last wish to Asvathama that he must be cremated with his friend Karna. He asks Asvathama to fulfill his last wish. Then Dwapara comes to him to bid farewell to him on the eve of his *yug*. Kauvara comments on Dharma and his comments are contradictory to the notion of Dharma which the Mahabharata is said to represent. Kaurava holds Krishna for the Bharata war and the defeat of Kauravas in the war through the ways of *adharm*a. The killing of Bhisma, Drona, Karna and his defeat in a single combat are done through the means of *adharm*a. He argues that where as the Pandavas and

Krishna are the violators of Dharma, he is projected as the violator of *adharmā*. When Kaurava utters the name of Krishna, the latter appears before him. Krishna justifies the accusation of Kaurava as the violator of Dharma by explaining that it is the act of Kaurava denying the share of kingdom due to the Pandavas which was responsible for the war and is an act of *adharmā*. Sanajaya escorts Dhritrashtra and Gandhari in search of their son. The scene ends with all of them falling on Kaurava with a heartbreaking cry.

In the seventh scene the location is back in the Kurukshetra. Krishna, Vidura, Kundi and Sahadeva are the characters in this scene. While Krishna shares his exclamation about the character of Kaurava with Vidura, Kundi arrives there with Sahadeva. She has come to the battle field in search of Karana. Kundi makes a long lamentation recollecting her mistake responsible for the death of Karna.

In the next scene, the mother who appeared in the second reappears. There is also an old woman. While Mother searches for her husband, the old woman is in search of her son both of whom have been killed in the battle. It is revealed that the husband belongs to the side of Pandavas while the son to that of the Kauravas. They have killed each other fighting for their masters although there is no reason for them to kill each other. The conversation reveals the wickedness of the Bharata war king the innocent people like this:

*Old Woman* – To which party did your husband belong?

*Mother* - he belonged to the Pandavas. And your son?

*Old Woman* – He was on the side of the Kaurava Emperor.

*Mother* - Was your son a foe of my husband?

*Old Woman* – Who is a foe to whom? Am I your foe?

*Mother* - What an idea?

*Old Woman* – Poor people like us are utterly stupid, my dear. If the Pandavas and the Kauravas fight over land, our children befriended one side or the other, and out of false pride, fight and kill one another. What enmity can be there between my son and your husband? Both of us my dear, are in the same distress. [Scene 8, 102]

The ninth scene is set in the funeral pyre of the Pandava army in a part of Kurukshetra graveyard. The brothers of Pandavas – Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna have assembled there to perform the cremation of their soldiers died in the Bharata war. Kundi arrives there with Sahadeva

carrying the corpse of Karna and pleads with her sons to cremate Karna along the Pandava soldiers. The brothers of Pandava refuse in one voice to do so as Karna belongs to their enemy camp. In the mean time, Asvathama arrives there to claim the corpse of Karna to cremate it with Kaurava as per the wish of the latter. Sahadeva informs them that Karna is none other than Kundi's son and thus their eldest brother. The evil-doing of the war of getting one's brother killed is expressed in the reaction of Arjuna to the revelation that Karna is his own brother: O Krishna, you lied to me And made me kill him, didn't you? [Scene 9, 106]

In the last scene, Lord Rudra and Krishna appear. They appear both as characters and as drama actors. Rudra talks in philosophy that everything has to come to the graveyard at the end. The graveyard is the place all the differences and discrimination among the people when they are brought to the graveyard after their death. Then Rudra as an actor asks Krishna as the play manager about his next play-project. He answers that the next play is about the Kaliyuga.

Kuvempu's *Kurukshetra Graveyard* is a unique play about the Bharata War. The uniqueness is observed in many ways. The play has recorded or registered the response of about thirty characters (people) of different background to the Bharata war. There are gods, devils, Pandavas, the Kauravas, the characters from the Mahabharata, soldiers, mother, wife, daughter. Except the response of Krishna and Dharmaraja, the response of all others is against and anti-Bharata war. The war has brought about enmity between own brothers; cousins, mother and son; Gurus and disciples. The war has killed brothers, cousins, gurus, and common people. Mothers have lost their sons, wives have lost husbands and friends have lost friends in the war. The Bharata War which is to have fought between Dharma and Adharma and has eradicated Adharma has also created enmity, anguish, despair, chaos. If what Bhima's statement that The Bharata war has turned out to be the foulest business is considered, Kurukshetra Graveyard rejects the notion that the Bharata War is noble. Thus the Bharata war is characterised by triviality in *Kurukshetra the Graveyard*.

## Reference

1. Kuvempu. (1982) "*Kurukshetra the Graveyard*" *Kuvempu's Three Plays*, Trans. Prabhu Shankara, Bangalore: Kannada Book Authority, 2003.