

Puruṣārthas: Perspectives from Mahabharata

All U.G

Course Category: Foundation

Schedule of Offering: Odd Sem (2020-21)

Course Credit Structure: 3

- Lecture: 3 Hours per week
- Tutorial: 0 Hours per week
- Practical: 0 Hours per week

Contact Hours per week: 3 Hours per week

Course Instructors: R.V.Raghavan, Dr. Ramakrishna Pejathaya

Course Code: EG 124

1. Introduction

The Mahabharata has been held in high esteem not only as a literary work but also for its philosophical content. Also, several art forms have drawn inspiration for their work from the Mahabharata. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the Mahabharata is an encyclopedia of Indian culture. This course offers an opportunity to explore the various facets of the Mahabharata.

However, we will focus on the ethical dimension of the text by exploring its relevance to the study of puruṣārtha-s (the ends of human life). The Mahabharata recognises itself as the ultimate guide to puruṣārtha-s धर्मं चार्थं च कामे च मोक्षे च भरतर्षभ । यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित् ॥ Every human being has several needs and desires and adopts suitable means to attain them. The set of all such needs and desires may be called the puruṣārtha-s. These have been classified into 4 sub-groups: dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. These include both the ends and the means to achieve the ends. In this course we shall try to understand the ethical framework of puruṣārtha and see how it offers us a way to “Live and let live.” Moreover, it is often observed that these needs and desires are in conflict with each other. We shall use the guiding light of the Mahabharata to see how such conflicts can be resolved.

2. Course Objectives

- To understand the concept of puruṣārtha and explore it as an ethical framework for our lives.
- To use the Mahabharata as a case study on how to resolve conflict between the various needs/desires.
- To understand the significance of Mahabharata in Indian culture.

3. Pre-requisites

Familiarity with devanāgarī script. Knowledge of Mahabharata story. Rudimentary

appreciation of Sanskrit language.

4. Readings

- a. Mahabharata, Critical Edition, BORI, 1919-1966. Selected portions.
- b. Mahabharata, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 2008. Selected portions.
- c. Yuganta, Irawati Karve, Disha Books, 1991. Selected chapters.
- d. On the Meaning of Mahabharata, V.S.Sukthankar, The Asiatic Society of Bombay, 1957. Selected portions. Here after OMM.
- e. Moral Dilemmas in Mahabharata, B.K.Matilal (ed), Indian Institute of Advanced Study and Motilal Banarsidass, 1992 (reprint). Selected papers. Here after MDM.
- f. Sharma, Arvind, *The purusharthas: A study of Hindu Axiology*, East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1982

5. Module-wise topics

Module 1 - Mahabharata: Overview and significance to Indian life (12 sessions)

In this module we try to give a comprehensive overview of Mahabharata and its significance to the Indian cultures. We shall see its influence on the literature, sciences, philosophy, fine arts and performance arts of India.

- Mahabharata as itihāsa
- Mahabharata as kāvya
- Mahabharata and the performing arts and fine arts
- Some contemporary retellings of Mahabharata: Literature and Films
- Mahabharata and other śāstrā-s
- Vyāsā's Mahabharata and Sukthankar's Mahabharata: A glimpse into the critical edition

Readings:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 11: The End of Yuga, Yuganta, pp. 1-8, pp. 183-219.

The Story on the mundane plane, OMM, pp. 32-61.

Suggested Reading:

Sukthankar, V.S. Prolegomena to the Critical Edition of The Mahabharata, Vol. 1.
Fitzgerald, James L. India's Fifth Veda: The Mahabharata's presentation of itself in Essays on Mahabharata, Arvind Sharma (ed), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2007

Module 2 - The Purushartha-s

(6 sessions)

The concept of puruṣārtha will be discussed in this module. We will draw from various moral sources to get as complete a conception of puruṣārtha as possible.

- Artha and Kāma
- Dharma
- Mokṣa

Readings:

Sharma, Arvind, Puruṣārthas, in Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction, Oxford

University Press, 2000, pp.186-191.

The meaning of puruṣārtha is the Mahabharata, MDM.

The story on the ethical plane, OMM.

Suggested Readings

Nayak, G.C., *Values:Dharma and Moksa*, In Philosophical Reflections, Nayak G.C., Motilal Banarsidass, 1987

Module 3 - Conflict and Conflict resolution

(9 sessions)

The various aspirations of human beings are often in conflict with each other. This calls for a mechanism to resolve such conflict which in turn entails the ordering of the puruṣārtha-s in to some specific hierarchy. We shall discuss the various ways in which these puruṣārtha-s have been prioritized in the Mahabharata and other source.

- Arguments for the supremacy of Kāma
- Arguments for the supremacy of Artha
- Arguments for the supremacy of Dharma
- Conclusion

Readings:

Moral Dilemmas: Insights from Indian epics, MDM

Hiriyanna, M. Philosophy of Values, in Indian Philosophy A Collection of Readings: Theory of Value, Roy Perrett (ed), 2010 (reprint), Routledge. pp. 1-11.

Suggested Reading

Chapter 9 (Value as material well-being), section 3 and Chapter 10 (Value as appetitive well-being) section 2 in, A conceptual-analytic study of classical Indian philosophy of morals, Rajendra Prasad, in History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian civilization, Volume XII Part 1, edited by D.P.Chattopadhyaya, Centre for Studies in Civilization, 2008.

Module 4 - Character and Episode analysis from Mahabharata (12 sessions)

In this module we will adopt a case-based approach to the study of conflict in performing one's duty. We shall do this by trying to analyse certain characters and episodes in Mahabharata.

- Bhīṣma and Vidura
- Droṇa
- Krishna and Karṇa
- Yudhiṣṭhira
- Gāndhāri and Kunti
- Draupadi
- The Dice Game/ Akṣakrīdā
- Yakṣa praśna
- The War
- Vidura Nīti and Kaṇika Nīti

Readings:

Matilal, B.K. Krishna: In Defence of a Devious Divinity in The Collected Essays of

Matilal, Volume 2, Ethics and Epics, edited by J. Ganeri, OUP, 2002, pp.91-109
 Das, Gurucharan, Draupadi's Courage, in The Difficulty of Being Good: On the subtle art of Dharma, Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 33-63.
 Karve, Chapter 9: Karna and Chapter 8: Paradharmo Bhayavahah, in Yuganta, pp. 138-158, pp. 121-137

Suggested Reading:

Arjuna's Moral Predicament, MDM
 Moral dilemmas in Mahabharata, MDM

Module 5 - Conclusion (6 sessions)

- Other messages from the Mahabharata: Karma yoga, Importance of Kartavya (Duty)
- Mahabharata on commonly held virtues like honesty, truth, forgiveness etc
- Summarizing the course

6. Pedagogy

The teaching will consist of lectures based on the reading material. The student is expected to participate actively in the class discussion especially for Modules 3 and 4. The classes will be a mix of synchronous live sessions, at least once a week and asynchronous sessions (in which videos or reading material will be uploaded on to the course's Moodle page and students can study it at their own pace).

7. Evaluation Pattern

Following is the evaluation plan of the course:

- Term paper: 25%
- Mid-semester exam: 25%
- Class Quiz: 30 %
- Assignment: 20%

8. Note on Plagiarism

Students are expected to be academically honest. This includes, among other things, a strict discipline against plagiarism. Since there are many forms of plagiarism the student is strongly advised to go through this useful guide here:

http://thevisualcommunicationguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Infographic_Did-I-Plagiarize1.jpg

Acts of plagiarism will be dealt with very severely. If a student is found plagiarizing, she/he will be warned and given zero in that assignment. If the student continues to plagiarize, they will be failed.