

## Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia

Manas Dutta

Assistant Professor

Department of History

Kazi Nazrul University, West Bengal

manas.dutta@knuedu.in

Roy, Kaushik (2012). *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia: From Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge University Press: New Delhi, pp. xix+288, Rs. 995 (Hardcover)

For too long, the history of military-strategy has been on the margins of mainstream academic study. Now, this has become a source of academic interests among the scholars and researchers. Military historians have fought a long battle for recognition of their works all over the world and obviously, South Asia is no exception in this regard.

Within the context of India, the research on military history was limited in its scope and nature. However, since 1995 onwards, the various facets of the Indian military history have been under exploration by Kaushik Roy along with a few other scholars. Considering the massive military history research done in the West from 1950s onwards, Kaushik Roy focuses on mapping and re-mapping the military culture in India and broadly South Asia.

The book, under review, is the recent published work by Kaushik Roy on the issue of Hinduism and the ethics of Warfare in South Asia. He argues that there is a real need for serious analysis of the pre-colonial warfare theories in India and challenges the (Western) scholar's common view that pre-

colonial India lacked a tradition of military strategy as well as military philosophy, as he informed us in the introduction (p. 2).

While describing the pre-colonial culture of warfare in India, he highlights the work of other thinkers like Manu (*Manusmriti*), Bana (Harsacharita) and Kamandaka (*Nitisara*). He writes that much before Prussian strategist Carl Von Clausewitz spoke about the relationship between righteous war, people's support and a stable government, Kamandaka, in India, had theorised these aspects in the sixth century CE. Besides, very few people know of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (third century BCE), which is one of the first books dealing with the use of biological warfare. Thus, while substantiating his arguments regarding the rich tradition of the culture of India, he explores the interconnections between religious ethics and how warfare is conducted. He also explores the debate between *dharmayuddha* (just war) and *kutayuddha* (unjust war) since ancient period onwards. His research centres on four questions-what is war, what justifies it, how should it be waged and what are its potential repercussions?

The book is divided into seven chapters, besides the introduction and the conclusion. It provides a useful glossary of Sanskrit and Hindi words. Furthermore, it highlights the interconnection between religion, Hinduism and their role in shaping the concept of warfare in South Asia from the collapse of Indus Valley civilization until today. Roy postulates that the theory of warfare has revolved around *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha*, which are not the strict equivalents to the concept of the just war and unjust war of the West.

Roy considers the parts of Buddhist, Jainist, Islamic and Christian religious traditions and proves how they have shaped the traditional Hindu view of the relationships between warfare, politics and good governance. Definitely, the monograph does not attempt to provide a through textual analysis of all the variety of religious and quasi-religious texts that can be considered as Hindu over the last two millennia.

In fact, what Roy seeks to unravel is the exploration of the treaties of the famous Hindu *acharyas* to give the reader a key to understanding the Hindu theoreticians' attitudes towards just and unjust wars. Thus, he provides insights into the interactions between the philosophy of warfare and the Hindu religious ethics in South Asia.

The first chapter of the monograph discusses how the *Vedas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* described a certain type of military ethics. This chapter also shows how the sub-continent witnessed varied constraints, which shaped the conduct of warfare. The second chapter focuses on the influence of Buddhism and Jainism on the evolution of *dhamma*, which was propagated by Asoka in ancient period. It also argues that this policy challenged the 'realist' tradition of *kuttayuddha*. The third chapter delves into the different strategies put forward by Kautilya in *Arthashastra*. The author proposes a comparative analysis between *Arthashastra* and several other political Western philosophers and Chinese thinkers.

How *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha* had evolved and its relevance to tenth century India is the focus of the fourth chapter. Roy uses several texts written by Manu and Kamandaka to strengthen his views. He delineates how the various theories of war in the Hindu philosophy have been reflected in some of the regional texts like *Hitopadesa*, *Panchatantra* and *Kathasaritsagar*. Roy uses these texts to show their impact on the evolution of the theories of warfare in Hinduism.

Subsequently, the next chapter deals with the responses of Hinduism to the establishment of the Islamic rule in India which included confrontation, gradual adaptation, coexistence and collaboration with each other. In the sixth chapter, the focus is on the role played by the British and the Indian nationalists to make use of Hinduism in such ways that it would serve their own purposes. This chapter also discusses the non-violence movement which Mahatma Gandhi pioneered.

In the last chapter, Roy analyses the impact of the legacy of ancient India's philosophy in post-colonial India and its contemporary conduct of both conventional and unconventional wars. In this same chapter, Roy provides an insight into India's nuclear policy as explained through the lens of the Hindu strategic thought.

The fact that the book explores the intricate relationship between Hinduism and the ethics of warfare renders it an essential read for students of Indian history. The book will also appeal to those interested in the sociology of war studies, since it is rich in citations, with both primary and secondary sources. Yet, one has to be careful while going through the bibliography (pp. 267-82). Roy cites numerous secondary works by well-known scholars as primary sources. Furthermore, he could have considered the Muslim documents to supplement his views on the Indian way of warfare for the medieval period; for example, he has not integrated the important work of Al-Beruni, Ziauddin Barani, Abul Fazl and many more Muslim scholars on the topic. Rather, he seems to be more focused on the Christian way of Just and Unjust war to explain the sub-continent's ethics of warfare (p. 126). To add, the mention of 'South Asia' in title seems unclear, as this may develop confusion among readers; since the author does not really examine traditions like that of the Hindu kingdom of Nepal, which is distinct yet part of the South Asian reality. Perhaps, he could have used India or the Indian sub-continent in the title instead of South Asia to convey his proper intention in writing this monograph. ■