

**Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia:
From Antiquity to the Present**, by Kaushik Roy, Cambridge
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In the academic field of modern history studies, historians dealing with South Asia largely neglect the historical evolution of military–strategic thought on the Indian subcontinent. It is also true that, both for political scientists and scholars of the specialized field of strategy, it is not very common to find people engaging with theories other than Western theories of warfare.¹ Nevertheless, the new generation of scholars has started to deal with these subjects.

In *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia*, Kaushik Roy explains that there is a real need for a serious analysis of the pre-colonial warfare theories in India. As shocking as it sounds, it is still very common for Western scholars to believe that pre-British India did not possess any relevant strategic thinking. Very few Western scholars have made a serious study of the strategic value of Hindu religious texts. Acknowledgedly, there is a lack of study of the different *acharya*'s (teacher) writings on *vigraha* (war).

The author gives several examples on how pre-colonial Indian warfare theories are understudied. He also explains how almost nobody in Europe or in the United States (US) knows about Kamandaka, who

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in the sixth century CE demonstrated the importance of the inter-relationship between righteous war, the support of the people, and the stability of the government. Similarly, 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.

In this book, Roy challenges the view that pre-colonial India lacked a tradition of military philosophy. The goal of this volume is to provide an analysis of the main effects of Hinduism on the evolution of theories of warfare in India from the dawn of civilization until the present era. Roy focuses on the complex debate between *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha* within Hindu philosophy. When presenting the choice of this focus, he presents them as ideal types that have never existed in a pure form. As he explains: 'The terms are to be understood as a heuristic device for clarifying certain trends in history.' Roy analyses that *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha* are concepts 'that can never actually be realized due to "frictions" in the real world' (p. 2). He also states that these two concepts have evolved through several steps for the last two millennia.

The book is divided into seven chapters that show the interconnections between the religion of Hinduism and both the theory and the praxis of warfare in South Asia from the collapse of Indus Valley civilization until today. Roy shows how the theory of warfare has revolved around *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha*, which are not the strict equivalents to just/holy war and unjust war.

The monograph takes into account parts of Buddhist, Jainist, Islamic and Christian religious traditions and how they have shaped the traditional Hindu view of the relationships between warfare, politics and good governance. The book does not attempt to provide a textual analysis of all the variety of religious and quasi-religious texts that can be considered as Hindu over the last two millennia. Roy proposes to analyse the treatises of famous Hindu *acharyas* so as to give the reader a key to understanding the Hindu theoreticians' attitudes towards just and unjust wars. He tries to give insights concerning the interaction between the philosophy of warfare and the Hindu religious ethics in South Asia. He acknowledges that he made the choice to focus on the grand tradition, which he defines as follows: 'The grand tradition is the high Sanskrit culture as exemplified by texts like *Arthashastra*, *Nitisara*, etc., generated

by persons close to the seat of state power for an elite audience' (p. 6). He also explains that he feels it is the best choice because both strategic managers and warlords throughout South Asian history have been mainly influenced by the grand tradition.

The first chapter of the book demonstrates how the Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata developed a certain type of military ethic. Roy highlights the constraints it imposed on the conduct of warfare on the Indian subcontinent. The second chapter focuses on the influence of Buddhism and Jainism on the evolution of *dhamma*, the Asokan policy, which in turn challenged the 'realist' tradition of *kuttayuddha*. The third chapter deals with the father of *kuttayuddha* school of thought, Kautilya, and his *Arthasastra*. Roy proposes a comparative analysis between *Arthasastra* and several political Western philosophers and ancient Chinese thinkers. The fourth chapter explains how *dharmayuddha* and *kuttayuddha* evolved between the common era and the coming of the Turks in the tenth century. In this chapter, the author deals with several texts. First, he gives some insights of the *Manavadharmasastra* from Manu. By analysing the *Nitisara* by Kamandaka, Roy shows how this book can be seen as a 'water-down' (p. 12) version of *kuttayuddha*. Seemingly, *Nitisara* makes us understand that, in the real world, both *dharmayuddha* and *karmayuddha* are desirable but there should then be a balance of the two types of war. As Roy explains, Kamandaka was supported by the *Harshacharita* by Bana, which developed a theory where depending on the situation, it could be judged necessary even for a righteous ruler to wage some form of *kuttayuddha*. Chapter 4 also discusses some regional literature, *Hitopadesa*, *Panchatantra* and *Kathasaritsgara*, and their impact on the evolution of the theories of war in Hindu philosophy. The fifth chapter shows the response of Hinduism to the establishment of Islamic rule on the subcontinent. This response evolved from confrontation with Islam to gradual adaptation and coexistence, and at times collaboration, with the Islamic polities. In the sixth chapter, the author explains how Hinduism has been used by both British and Indian nationalists in such ways that it would serve their own purposes. This chapter also focuses on non-violence as Gandhi enunciated it. In the seventh and last chapter, Roy analyses what has been the legacy of ancient India's philosophy in post-colonial India and the country's conduct of both conventional and unconventional wars. Roy finally provides an insight

on India's nuclear policy as analysed through the lens of Hindu strategic thought.

NOTE

1. Bugault, G. *L'Inde pense-t-elle?*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994.