

into a recurrent theme, may re-define Satish Acharya's perspective towards what Acharya calls as the "normative thought" in Gandhi or what Shasheej Hedge's marks as the notion of writing as opposed to philosophy (or judgement) in Gandhi. Finally, the very significant aspect of what the author calls as Gandhi's "anti-political politics" may be deliberated in conjunction with Reinhard Fred Dallmyr's optimism regarding the 'future' of democracy.

Therefore, this text is an important contribution to farther original and critical discourse in Gandhian scholarship and an attempt to reflect on the politics of democracies which seems so important in contemporary terms.

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THE MORAL IMAGINATION OF THE MAHABHARATA. By Nikhil Govind. New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2022. 172 pp.

In the timeless expanse of Indian literature, the *Mahabharata* stands as a monumental epic, a narrative tapestry woven with threads of virtue, vice, and the intricate dance of destiny. In the scholarly voyage undertaken by Nikhil Govind in *The Moral Imagination of the Mahabharata*, the timeless verses of the *Mahabharata* are transmuted into a nuanced exploration of the moral imagination, with a particular emphasis on the quartet of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. As the author deftly navigates the labyrinthine corridors of this ancient narrative, the reader is beckoned into a contemplative odyssey that transcends time, resonating with echoes of ethical dilemmas and existential quandaries that remain as pertinent today as they did millennia ago. With erudition as his compass and the literary tradition of *Mahabharata* as his literary kaleidoscope, Govind invites us to traverse the landscape of righteousness, material prosperity, desire, and spiritual liberation, challenging our perceptions and beckoning us to engage with the profound ethical calculus that animates the heart of this epic tale.

The book is thematically organised into four chapters based on the quartet of the primary goals of human existence, i.e., *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. This book adds to the extensive spectrum of critical discourse on the *Mahabharata*, however, what sets it apart from the rest is that in dealing with the four-fold values of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*, the author does not presume the terms to be self-evident. Govind engages in a critical investigation of these concepts as he argues that contrary to the popular notion, nothing about the quartet is fixed in stone. In fact, these terms are fluid in their functionality and are contingent on the context they appear. In the introduction to this book, Govind highlights the centrality of the four-fold values in the narratological schema of the *Mahabharata* by stating that Vyasa intended *shanta rasa* and *moksha* to be the primary objectives of the narrative. "The ultimate meaning of the *Mahabharata* thus appears very clearly: the two subjects intended by the author [Vyasa] as primary are the *rasa* of peace and human goal of liberation" (1). However, unlike Vyasa, Govind professes that each of the four-fold values holds equal importance within the narratological framework of the *Mahabharata*.

The primary thesis of this book expounds that though the quartet of life goals may appear, at a cursory glance, to be in contradiction to one another, they are, in fact, complimentary to each other. The inherent conflictual tendencies of the four-fold values stem from their soteriological orientation in case of *dharma* and *moksha*, on one hand, and the worldly/materialistic orientation of *artha* and *kama*, on the other hand. The inherent contradictions of the quartet engender the moral anxieties that permeate the text of the *Mahabharata*. As Govind ponders, "Are these two aims — especially

*dharmamoksha* and *artha* — ultimately complimentary or conflictual” (46). However, he also acknowledges that none of the four-fold values could exist in isolation as they derive their “meaning only in relation to each other” (55), thereby highlighting the inter-relationship of the quartet. The *Mahabharata* itself embodies the inherent moral dilemma as it acutely engages with human and cosmic violence but also accepts and acknowledges the ultimate futility of it all. Though the text of *Mahabharata* has prominent and elaborate didactic sections such as the twelfth book of *Mahabharata*, i.e., ‘The Book of Peace’ is a strong case in point, Govind in his work instead chooses to focus on the narrative sections with the objective of unveiling “the moral heterogeneity of the *Mahabharata*” (9), and thus justifying the title of this book. Govind, in this book, attempts to construct a conceptual unity concerning the four-fold values, which is in congruence with the works of other eminent scholars such as, Alf Hiltebeitel.

While ensconcing this book firmly within the space of critical discourse on the *Mahabharata*, Govind also acknowledges the contribution of the pre-colonial scholars whose exemplary works usually get overshadowed by the plethora of Western scholarship. Govind observes the influence exerted by scholarly works and critical commentaries of erudite Indian scholars such as, Devabodha during the eleventh century in Kashmir, Arjunamishra during sixteenth century Bengal, and Appayya Dikshit during sixteenth century in Tamil Nadu. Govind’s own work is influenced by the first century Kashmiri scholar Abhinavagupta’s *rasa* theory-oriented commentary on the *Mahabharata*. Govind also notes the rupture in the Indian critical tradition brought forth by the advent of colonialism, which resulted in the European intervention in the traditional *Mahabharata* scholarship. While the pre-colonial Indian scholarship was primarily based on critical commentaries, the colonial era European scholarship, on the other hand, focused more on collection of manuscripts, translation projects and analysed the text through philological and historical frameworks. The very essence of conceptualisation and comprehension of the world differed in Indian and European scholarly tradition, which is illustrated by Govind through the binary division between nature and culture. The nature-culture binary divide is a Western notion, one that did not exist in the pre-colonial aesthetics and sensibilities of Indian philosophy and literature. Govind emphasises that in the narratological schema of the *Mahabharata*, the city or the urban space was not conceptualised as a corrupted, degenerate space in moral opposition to the pristine forest, because forest was not portrayed as a utopia but rather as a worldly space with its own share of dangers and internal politics.

The first chapter which is titled “Dharma” begins with asking the pertinent question on what makes the eighteen days war at Kurukshetra, which constitutes the central theme of *Mahabharata*, inevitable. The chapter asks of its reader whether the war could have been avoided through committed peace missions or was it pre-destined because of the martial values of the Kshatriya class. As Govind contemplates, “Is the war indeed a fate that the gods cannot stall, or is it that martial values are the motor that makes war inevitable, even desired?” (19). The author, in this chapter, emphasises the inherent contradictions embedded within the value of *dharmā*, especially with reference to the futility of the peace missions and the inevitable war of death and destruction. Govind employs the narrative framework of the fifth book of *Mahabharata*, i.e., ‘The Book of Effort’ to emphasise the conflictual nature of *dharmā*, as he argues that the fifth book is more appropriately positioned within the narrative than *Bhagavad Gita*, which is more commonly perceived as a treatise on the nature of *dharmā*. In this chapter, Govind explicates on the different and often contradictory forms of *dharmā*. Govind argues that the *dharmā* of peace is in conflict with and overshadowed by the belligerent *dharmā* and martial values of the Kshatriya clan. In fact, the Kshatriya *dharmā* of violence permeates the frantic peace negotiations that take place before the war, which ultimately leads to the failure of the peace missions. Therefore, it becomes evident that *dharmā* is a complicated value. Contrary to the popular understanding of the term, *dharmā* does not entail a clear demarcation between good and bad, moral and immoral, black and white, and so on. Govind also brings forth several characters’ varied perspectives on war, which are at times in complete opposition to each other. Yudhishtira

perceives the war objectively, dispassionately and impersonally. He believes that the war constitutes his *dharma* because it would contribute to a larger cosmic cause and greater public good. While Draupadi, on the other hand, supports and argues in favour of the war because she believes it is her right, as a queen of the Pandavas, to avenge her public humiliation.

The second chapter titled “Artha” deals with the narrative sequences of Satyawati and Amba, thereby analysing the complex connection between gender politics and *artha*. In the latter part of this chapter, the author also explicates on Duryodhana’s insight into the intricacies of *artha* and worldly ambitions. The author conceptualises *artha* not merely as monetary value but as all forms of worldly and materialistic ambitions. Through the tale of Satyawati’s intense ambition to become the matriarch of the Kuru dynasty, Govind observes that even the most well-intended human actions can entail disastrous consequences, thus delving into the perennial debate about free will vs. destiny. Through the story of Amba, whose life had been one long ordeal of loss, rejection and revenge, Govind argues that austerities, which are usually associated with soteriological goals could also be employed for attaining worldly aspirations. He observes that people deeply ensconced in matters of life and world, like Amba, completely dedicate themselves to austerities not for any desire of moksha but for attaining their worldly aims, which in Amba’s case is her intense desire to bring about Bhishma’s death so that she could avenge herself. Anger, an emotion that is deprecated by every wise person including Yudhishtira, is emphasised and celebrated in Amba’s tale. Likewise, Duryodhana also exhibits intense worldly desires and materialistic attachments. Therefore, Govind ingeniously claims Duryodhana to be the truest and fittest heir of the resourceful and ambitious queen Satyawati. The author through his explication on the characters of Satyawati, Amba and Duryodhana, argues that all three of them share a strong sense of worldly obligations and ambitions. They do not shy away from claiming their stake in this world, which consequently renders them significant and powerful characters, a force to reckon with.

The third chapter titled “Kama” entails the sexual encounters and experiences of the ascetic Rishyasringa and Arjuna, as well as the romantic tale of Nala and Damayanti. Interestingly, Govind chose to delve on the ascetic Rishyasringa’s tale in a chapter on *kama* in order to understand the conflictual relationship between sexuality, desire and asceticism, which are generally perceived to be the seemingly disparate spheres of human existence. The author notes that *kama* in the diegetic schema of Mahabharata is conceptualised as transcending the straitjacketed categories of gender and even species. *Kama*, rather than merely being a physical and sensual pleasure, also embodies the interconnectedness of all beings at a higher level of consciousness. In Rishyasringa’s case, *kama* helped him in bonding socially and assisted him in assuming the social roles of husband and father. *Kama*, therefore, made him comprehend his human subjectivity and desire. For Rishyasringa, his desire and austerities were not in conflict with each other, rather his austerities complemented and whetted his experiences of desire. *Kama*, especially in the sense of extended languid, becomes a central theme in the later Sanskrit tradition of *mahakavya*. These epic narratives are mostly based on the episodes of romantic encounters, sexual escapades and intrigues in *Mahabharata*, the tale of Nala and Damayanti being one of the most favourite of Sanskrit composers.

The fourth and last chapter titled “Moksha,” the author focuses on *Harivamsha* which narrativizes the life of the divine entity Krishna and explicates on the intricacies of *moksha*. Highlighting the aim of this chapter, Govind states, “There are arguably many notions of *moksha* in the *Mahabharata*, and this chapter does not claim to explicate them all- it focuses on one indubitable strand- the life narrative of Krishna” ((113). Govind sagaciously argues that Krishna is the harbinger of a new form of divinity, while Indra and Balarama represent the older conceptualisation of divinity. Indra especially embodies the older forms of gods, who is impersonal, distant, whimsical and must always be feared and placated by the worshipper. While Krishna, on the other hand, represents a notion of divinity that is personal and intimately connected to the person lives of each and every devotee. Govind, by focussing on *Harivamsha*, also initiates a dialogue on the Bhakti movement that spanned

across India during the medieval ages, emphasising particularly on the personal devotion (*bhakti*) to Krishna, which would consequently enable the devotee to attain *moksha*.

In the conclusion, the author discusses the Sanskrit literary tradition of later period which were immensely influenced by the *Mahabharata*. The concluding section discusses in detail a fourth century Sanskrit play by Bhasa, *The Shattered Thigh*. This play presents a dramatic reimagination of the final duel between Bheema and Duryodhana. Since this play also deals extensively with moral questions and ethical dilemmas, the inclusion of a detailed analysis of this play therefore becomes a perfect conclusion to the book dealing with the moral imagination of the *Mahabharata*.

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DREAM PROJECTS IN THEATRE, NOVELS AND FILMS: THE WORKS OF PAUL CLAUDEL, JEAN GENET, AND FEDERICO FELLINI. By Yehuda Moraly. UK: Liverpool University Press, 2021. 224 pp.

“You shall come to Valvins and we shall dig a hole in the middle of a field and bury all this sorrowful paper. We shall make a tomb for all this paper which contains so much of my life,” (4) writes Mallarmé on his deathbed to Henri de Régnier requesting him to destroy his lifelong dreamt project *Le Livre*. In the fictional world, from Balzac’s *The Unknown Masterpiece* to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and Pirandello’s *The Mountain Giants*, the existence of an ‘impossible’ art is a given. For Moraly, it is a kind of law in real life too, where ‘...artistic creation frequently, if not – at some point or another – inevitably, entails battling with a work dreamed of but which remains forever unrealized (2)’. The book furthers the research on the very process that goes behind such an artistic creation.

Originally in French, the book is called *L’oeuvre impossible*. It is a book of biographical research that deals in detail with three incomplete projects, namely; the fourth part of *Couffontaine Tetralogy* by Paul Claudel; *La Mort* (‘The Death’) by Jean Genet; and *Viaggio di G. Mastorna* (The Journey of G. Mastorna), a phantom film by Federico Fellini. Using drafts and correspondences, the author explores these and various other “dream projects” to exhibit why they remained incomplete, how the unfinished arts reflect personal and professional aspirations, frustrations, and fantasies of their creators, and how these projects live on through subsequent works forever.

A devout Catholic, Claudel worked for about forty years on a tetralogy of plays that would depict the story of the evolution of the relation between Judaism and Christianity. It was his dream project, and a rather ambitious one, that would combine poetry, music, dance, and visual arts. He never finished it but Moraly finds its traces in several of Claudel’s subsequent works. He analyzes Claudel’s works, such as his epic tetralogy *The Satin Slipper* and his collaboration with Arthur Honegger on *Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher* along with several of his notes and letters to induce that Claudel’s dream project is marked by a paradoxical combination of grandeur and fragility. The author painstakingly exhibits how this contradiction present throughout the playwright’s art is a reflection of the tension between his religious beliefs and artistic ambitions.

For Jean Genet, Moraly focuses on his never completed text *La Mort* and calls this section in the book ‘A Triply Murderous Work’. He connects this dream project to Genet’s identity as a homosexual. Genet aspired to create a work that would reflect the phenomenon of ‘being’ a homosexual. As professed to Sartre, for him the very identity of a homosexual was akin to ‘a death instinct’. Although his dream project was never realized, this instinct, according to Moraly, manifests in the works of Genet at three levels – the death of the subject, the suicide of the author, and the destruction