

The Art of Combat: *Yudha Nīti*, *Dharma* and *Karma* in Ancient Indian Martial Practices

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Abstract

This paper explores the principles and responsibilities governing warriors in ancient India, mainly through the lens of *Dhanurveda*¹ and the broader cultural and ethical frameworks of the time. It delves into the practical elements alongside the philosophical aspects while emphasising a holistic approach to warfare that encompasses physical skills, strategic thinking, ethical conduct, and the integration of martial knowledge with moral responsibilities. The ancient texts serve as historical records and sources of philosophical insights on the art and science of warfare in ancient India, encouraging a deeper understanding of the *Yudha Nīti*² (War Ethos) in the context of *dharma*³ and *karma*⁴. The epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* demonstrate the interplay of *dharma* and martial duty. Characters like Arjuna and Rama grapple with dilemmas of duty and righteousness in battle, highlighting the conflict between personal morals and societal responsibilities. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna instructs Arjuna on his duty as a *Kshatriya* (Warrior) and the importance of fulfilling one's *dharma* above personal interests or fears, underscoring the spiritual aspect of martial engagement. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, written in the 4th century BCE, is one of the most significant ancient Indian texts on statecraft, military strategy, and economics and, therefore, serves as a comprehensive treatise that not only addresses the art of combat but also integrates military strategy with broader themes of governance and human psychology. It remains a relevant and influential work in the study of statecraft and military affairs, and its insights into the complexities

of warfare continue to be explored in contemporary contexts. Incidentally, the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), also known as the Law of Armed Conflict, governs the conduct of modern armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects, particularly on non-combatants and civilians. Eventually, the relationship between the current IHL and the ancient Indian martial arts needs to be explored, especially in the context of ethical conduct in warfare, with emphasis on the principles of *dharma* (righteousness) and *karma* (duty) in combat that shaped ancient Indian martial practices and guided warriors in their training and conduct in battle. Before expounding further, we should thoroughly understand the art of combat in the Indian context.

Keywords: Yudha Nīti, Dharma, Karma, Ancient Indian Martial Practices

I

'The Art of Combat'⁵ in ancient Indian martial practices is a testimony to India's rich historical, cultural, and philosophical landscape. Dating back to the Vedic period (approximately 1500-500 BCE), these martial traditions are prominently featured in classic texts like the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, which depict advanced martial skills and diverse weaponry, including Ravana's wisdom to Lakshmana during the concluding part of the War and Bhisma's advice to Arjuna during the *Udyoga Parva* (Book of Effort), before the battle of Kurukshetra begins when the grand elder of the Kuru dynasty tries to guide Arjuna in understanding his duty and how to fight with righteousness. Incidentally, the *Kshatriyas* (the warrior class) were the primary practitioners, trained not only in combat techniques for warfare but also in personal defence, emphasising a code of conduct rooted in *dharma*. Various martial arts emerged, such as *Kalaripayattu*, renowned as one of the oldest fighting

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systems, integrating strikes, grappling, and weaponry with yoga and traditional medicine. Other forms, like *Gatka* practised by Sikhs, focus on wooden stick skills and self-defence, while *Mallu Silambam* highlights agility using flexible sticks. *Malla-yuddha*, a wrestling style mentioned in age-old texts, laid the groundwork for modern Indian wrestling, showcasing the evolution of these techniques. Additionally, skills in archery and the mastery of various weapons illustrate the importance of martial prowess in ancient warfare. Traditional practices like *Chhau* intertwine martial arts with dance and drama, further enriching cultural expressions. The martial arts stated above are not merely physical endeavours; they embody more profound philosophical tenets that align combat with ethical imperatives, positioning warriors as defenders of the weak rather than aggressors. These ancient martial arts training involved rigorous physical conditioning, weapon proficiency, and mental discipline. This holistic approach reflects the broader Indian tradition that values mind, body, and spirit integration. Practitioners honed their combat techniques and learned strategic formations and battlefield tactics, ensuring a well-rounded skill set. Furthermore, the impact of martial arts extends beyond physicality; they have significantly influenced various cultural dimensions, including dance, theatre, and literature, where themes of courage, honour, and heroism prevail. Historical narratives and epic accounts often glorify warriors, embedding martial practices into the cultural consciousness of Indian society. Consequently, ancient Indian martial arts function as a microcosm of the values and beliefs of their time, representing not just combat skills but a rich rummage of cultural identity, ethical considerations, and historical significance interwoven into the fabric of Indian history.

II

*yasya nāsti svayam pārtho dhanurvede ca sāstravoit |
tasya yuddhe kṣayam nāsti na ca vighnam vicārayet | |*

(Rajagopalachari, *The Mahabharata: 'Bhishma Parva'*, p.126.)

[He who does not possess expertise, like Partha, in the science of weaponry and lacks proficiency should refrain from entering into battle and not ponder the obstacles that may arise in that conflict.]

The verse above from the *Mahābhārata* highlights a timeless principle regarding warfare: combat expertise, particularly in weaponry, is essential for success in battle. The instructions conveyed within these lines stress that those lacking the necessary skills and knowledge, like Arjuna (Partha), should avoid conflict. The underlying emphasis is on the significance of strategic preparation and effective leadership, which are crucial for military

success. Only through a combination of profound knowledge and practical application can one navigate the complexities of warfare, addressing potential challenges that may arise.

In ancient Indian military philosophy, *Dhanurveda*, commonly understood as the 'Science of Archery,' transcends mere archery to encompass a broader territory of military science, embodying strategy and its practical application. This duality is critical in understanding how ancient Indian tradition approached warfare. Textual sources such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Śukranīti*, *Manusmṛti*, *Nītisāra*, *Arthaśāstra*, and *Rājataranṅiṇī* and other significant texts articulate an ethical framework emphasising victory, restraint, and ethical considerations in combat. This humane approach contrasts with other ancient civilisations' often brutal warfare practices. The *Rāmāyaṇa* describes numerous battles, including using divine weapons (*astra*), siege warfare, and battlefield formations. The legendary War of *Mahābhārata* is foundational in illustrating the essentiality of strategic formations and the organisation of warriors. The use of chariots and infantry, along with formations like *Chakra Vyuh*, exemplifies the emphasis on tactical efficiency and leadership. Primarily a treatise on statecraft, economics, and military strategy, Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* contains detailed descriptions of various aspects of warfare, including fortifications, espionage, covert operations, war elephants, different types of warfare (open, concealed, etc.), and battlefield formations. It also emphasises psychological warfare and diplomacy as tools of statecraft while advocating pragmatic approaches to warfare, including deception and indirect methods when necessary. Primarily a historical text, Kalhan's *Rājataranṅiṇī* provides accounts of various military campaigns, sieges, and the use of tactics by kings and generals in ancient Kashmir. It includes accounts of chivalrous behaviour and the moral responsibilities of kings and soldiers in warfare. Eventually, examining the historical context and significant wars within the Indian subcontinent will provide a wide-ranging exploration of how various dynasties and kingdoms approached military engagements, providing the practical and appropriate dimensions of warfare.

The Maurya-Greek conflicts (305-180 BCE) showcase how military innovation and the integration of diverse tactics allowed the Mauryan Empire to expand and consolidate control over Central Asia. The practical application of war elephants and the adaptation to enemy formations reflected a sophisticated understanding of warfare dynamics sufficient for success in a complex geopolitical landscape. The Gupta Empire's confrontation with the White Huns in the 4th to 5th centuries C.E. presents a transition in military strategies as swift cavalry

movements and defensive fortifications were utilised to counter nomadic insurgents. Though this period signifies a decline in Gupta sovereignty, it highlights the ongoing evolution in military tactics necessitated by external threats and internal vulnerabilities. The Chola dynasty, with its emphasis on naval power and the utilisation of advanced maritime technology, illustrates the expansiveness of ancient Indian military strategies. Their complex military organisation, which integrated infantry, cavalry, and navy, illustrates a well-rounded approach to warfare that sought to dominate land and sea routes. Similarly, other South Indian empires, such as the Vijayanagara Empire, maintained naval strength to conduct extensive maritime operations, showcasing how geography influenced military strategies.

The Delhi Sultanate's encounters with Mongol invaders in the 13th to 14th centuries highlight the impact of siege tactics and mounted archery on urban defence strategies. Though Genghis Khan and his descendants were often viewed as formidable adversaries, the resilience of the Delhi Sultanate against these invasions was indicative of the military understanding developed through previous experiences. The Mughal-Maratha Wars of the 17th and 18th centuries encapsulated a pivotal change in military tactics as the declining Mughal Empire confronted the guerrilla warfare employed by the Marathas. The adaptation of artillery tactics and the subsequent incorporation of modern weaponry set the stage for shifts in power dynamics in India, creating pathways for the emergence of new powers within the subcontinent. The Anglo-Maratha Wars (late 18th to early 19th centuries) and the consequent consolidation of British control over India further illustrate a complex interplay of military strategy, diplomacy, and colonial ambition. Notably, figures like Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan showcased readiness to challenge British expansion, capitalising on local knowledge and innovative strategies to resist extraneous dominance. The Sepoy Mutiny (1857-1858) united diverse factions against British colonial rule, underscoring the multidimensionality of resistance. The tactics employed during the said 'urban warfare' displayed ingenuity from Indian forces, as rebels utilised familiar terrains and guerrilla tactics to counter British military discipline and artillery. The bravery and leadership of individuals like Rani Lakshmibai, Nana Sahib, Mangal Pandey, Begum Hazrat Mahal and others crystallised the emergence of a nationalist struggle, setting the stage for a historical narrative of resistance.

In recasting these historical episodes, it becomes evident that military success in the Indian subcontinent has been intricately linked to an evolving understanding of warfare as both a science and an art. As dynasties rose and fell, their strategies, organisations, and approaches

to military ethics and modernity have continued to impact military thought and practice. The enduring legacy of these historical conflicts remains relevant as a foundational reference for contemporary military studies and the significance of integrating ethical considerations within warfare. Ultimately, examining India's military history reveals a tapestry rich in lessons highlighting the symbiotic relationship between knowledge, practice, and morality in the ever-evolving combat domain.

III

The examination of warfare in Indian history reveals the evolution of tactics and strategies shaped by advancements and interactions that reflect the subcontinent's rich tapestry of cultures, ideologies, and influences. Remarkably, depicting two significant wars from ancient Indian epics—the Rama-Ravana conflict from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the battle of Kurukshetra from the *Mahābhārata* offers profound insights into timeless ethical and philosophical themes.

The Rama-Ravana war is not merely a physical confrontation; it symbolises the eternal struggle between *dharma* (good) and *adharma* (evil). This epic narrative delves into nuanced explorations of morality, righteousness, and the cosmic implications of actions to pursue justice. Despite being a formidable antagonist, Ravana represents the consequences of hubris and overreaching ambition, often underestimating the strength of his adversaries, most notably Hanuman. Ravana's fate serves as a cautionary narrative about the implications of unchecked ego and the mistakes that arise from arrogance, especially as he confronts his flaws in moments of regret, such as during his dialogue with Laxman before his demise. Conversely, Rama emerges as a paragon of virtue, though his character shows signs of complexity. His decision to exile Sita challenges the simplistic perception of righteousness, showcasing the ethical dilemmas faced even by the most virtuous figures. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, therefore, effectively portrays the duality of human nature, illuminating the intricate balance between moral principles and societal expectations. It teaches the importance of self-awareness and discernment, suggesting that steadfast adherence to *dharma* requires navigating difficult choices even in morally ambiguous situations. In the broader interpretation of Ravana's defeat, the philosophy of *karma* plays a crucial role. His life choices, characterised by a disregard for *dharma* and the suffering of others, lead to a buildup of negative *karma* that culminates in his downfall. This law of cause and effect highlights that actions, whether virtuous or vicious, carry consequences that shape one's destiny, ultimately embodying the moral architecture of the epic.

Similarly, the *Mahābhārata*, viewed through the lens of the *Bhagavad Gita*, underscores the complexities of duty in wartime. The *Gita* invites a critical examination of the warriors' responsibilities and moral quandaries. Arjuna's initial hesitation before engaging in battle epitomises the internal conflict faced by individuals caught in the throes of righteous war. The text recognises that true valour transcends physical conflict and requires a deep understanding of *dharma*. The *Gita* also articulates an imperative framework for how warriors should conduct themselves. Emphasising that the nobility of a warrior lies in their commitment to righteousness, it asserts that bravery and fearlessness in the face of overwhelming odds define true valour.

Moreover, it posits that the intent behind actions, rather than the instruments of destruction, ultimately determines the ethical standing of a warrior's choices. While common interpretations of the *Gita* often frame it as a doctrine advocating for just wars, it can further be viewed as a reflective commentary on the moral responsibilities of warriors. This dual reading enriches our understanding of the ethics surrounding warfare and calls for a profound contemplation of human motivations, duties, and the profound lessons that emerge from these epic narratives. The striking contrasts and moral complexities inherent in the Rama-Ravana war and the Kurukshetra battle provide timeless insights into the human condition, ethics, and the pursuit of righteousness amidst the tumult and tremor of combat within the broader framework and the fever and fret of existence.

IV

The relationship between ethical frameworks, such as those outlined in the *Bhagavad Gita* (essentially showcasing moral archetypes in war) and International Humanitarian Law – IHL (emphasising legal constraints on warfare), offers a fascinating perspective on the ethical landscape of warfare. These two paradigms, one rooted in ancient Indian philosophy and the other in contemporary international law, provide complementary yet distinct insights into the ethics of conflict and combat. Eventually, we will critically expand upon the points mentioned, examining the convergence and divergence between the teachings of the *Gita* and IHL and their broader implications on the modern global stage.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred scripture of the Hindu tradition, is often interpreted as a dialogue intervening in crucial moral dilemmas faced by Arjuna, a warrior prince, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Central to this dialogue is the concept of *dharma*, denoting duty and righteousness. Krishna's teachings compel Arjuna to pursue his duty as a warrior, emphasising the necessity

of engaging in 'righteous war' (*dharma-yuddha*) for justice and cosmic order. This foundational premise is felt at the core of *Gita's* ethical propositions, establishing a framework that transcends mere utilitarian calculation. Krishna's instructions to Arjuna underscore the importance of acting without attachment to outcomes. This principle resonates with maintaining composure in the face of dualities such as victory and defeat, pleasure and pain. This notion reflects a disciplined approach where adherence to duty takes precedence over personal desire. Thus, while the *Gita* advocates engagement in conflict, it does not endorse violence or the erratic pursuit of power; instead, it calls for mindful navigation of the complexities of human relationships and responsibilities.

*Atha cet tvam imam dharmyam saṅgrāmaṁ na karisyasi |
tataḥ sva-dharmaṁ kīrtim ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi ||*

(*Bhagavad-Gita*, 2.33)

[If, however, you do not perform your religious duty of fighting, then you will certainly incur sins for neglecting your duties and thus lose your reputation as a fighter] (Prabhupada, 1968, p.107)

*Akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni, kathayiṣyanti te'vyayām |
sambhāvitasya cākīrtir, maraṇād atiricyate ||*

(*Bhagavad-Gita*, 2.34)

[People will always speak of your infamy, and for a respectable person, dishonour is worse than death] (Prabhupada, 1968, p.108)

Lord Krishna counsels Arjuna on the moral and ethical dilemmas of war and duty through the verses above. It emphasises the importance of *dharma* (duty) and the consequences of inaction in the face of righteousness. It addresses the fear of loss of honour and the potential shame of failing to do what is considered one's duty.

Parāśara Samhitā also advances a similar narrative, which emphasises the responsibilities of a *Kṣatriya* to protect the people and maintain order according to righteous principles after overcoming adversaries.

*Kṣatriyo hi prajā rakṣan, sastra-panih pradandayan |
Nirjitya para-sainyādi, kṣītim dharmena pālayet ||*

(*Parāśara Samhitā*: 1.57)

[The *Kṣatriya* should protect their subject people, conquer the armed forces of their adversaries with mighty prowess and rule the country according to the rules of virtue (dharma).] (Parāśara, 1979, p. 542.)

We are reminded here of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a legal construct designed to mitigate the effects of armed conflict. It encompasses a series of treaties and customary laws, establishing rules intended

to protect those not participating in hostilities (civilians, medical personnel) and to regulate the means and methods of warfare. Fundamental principles of IHL include 'distinction' (Rule 1, pp. 3-9.), which mandates a clear differentiation between combatants and non-combatants; 'proportionality' (Rule 14, pp. 46-50.), which restricts excessive civilian harm concerning the anticipated military advantage; and 'precaution' (Rule 15, pp. 51-55.), which calls for all feasible attempts to avoid civilian casualties during military operations. (Henckaerts and D-Beck, 2005). Thus, IHL does not concern itself with the justification for war (*jus ad bellum*⁶) but the conduct during war (*jus in bello*⁷). (Dinstein, 2017, pp. 2-3.) This distinction is crucial; IHL operates within a pragmatic framework that emphasises compliance with legal norms rather than moral justification. Thus, the legal framework of IHL caters explicitly to modern warfare's difficulties, considering the humanitarian impacts induced by conflict. The discussion now opens the scope for exploring the convergence in the context of ethics and minimisation of harm.

Despite their different foundations, the *Bhagavad Gita* and IHL share a crucial commonality: both advocate for ethical conduct within the theatre of warfare and emphasise the importance of minimising harm. (Mani, 1992, pp.149–155.) The imperative of the *Gita* towards equanimity advocates for mental discipline, suggesting that those engaged in warfare must train their minds to rise above the traditional emotional responses to conflict. This mental cultivation feeds into the broader humanitarian principles espoused by IHL, where the aim remains to minimise unnecessary suffering for all involved, especially non-combatants. Moreover, both frameworks reflect a fundamental recognition of human dignity. Just as IHL seeks to protect individuals from the ravages of war, whether soldiers or civilians, the *Gita* focuses on righteous action, highlighting a moral obligation to uphold a standard of conduct based on justice and cosmic order. Both positions elucidate a responsibility towards others in wartime, invoking a sense of shared humanity that transcends ethnic, national, or sectarian boundaries. What, then, is the divergence in the light of Duty vs. Justification? However, in the *Gita* and IHL, divergence is as significant as convergence. IHL does not assess or dictate whether initiating a conflict is just or unjust. Its concern lies solely with how those conflicts are conducted. Conversely, the *Gita* is steeped in the concept of *dharma*, presenting the idea that wars can be righteous under certain circumstances. This perspective introduces a moral dimension to the discussion about warfare, raising questions that IHL tends to bypass. Nevertheless, the framing of war within a narrative of moral righteousness, as the *Gita* prescribes,

presents complexities that challenge the purely legalistic approach of IHL. In practice, this invites questions such as: What constitutes a just war? Who determines the righteousness of a conflict: state actors, religious leaders, or international communities? The interconnectedness of morality and legality in such considerations speaks to broader philosophical inquiries regarding the nature of just governance and ethical responsibility in conflict, opening the scope for a case study of modern applications and moral dilemmas.

Incidentally, contemporary conflicts often illuminate the challenges in aligning the principles of the *Gita* and IHL. For example, in the context of the Civil Wars in different settings, we confront various moral and ethical dilemmas where actors justify their bases for military engagement framed in terms of *dharma*. Meanwhile, IHL guidelines stress various parties' humanitarian obligations, asserting the need to protect non-combatants amidst the struggle. The reality of asymmetric warfare—where non-state actors often engage state militaries—adds another layer of complexity. Groups may argue ethically for their cause, akin to Arjuna's battle for justice, even if their methods contravene IHL, which seeks to uphold the distinction between combatants and civilians. The scenario thus showcases the challenges embedded within both frameworks while examining the multifaceted nature of modern conflict. Hence, the interdependence of spiritual and legal frameworks is solicited.

As we navigate the historical and contemporary implications of warfare, an understanding emerges that evokes a reconsideration of how ethical considerations can be meaningfully integrated into legal frameworks. The universal values underscored within the *Gita*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata* may offer poignant insights and depth into the legal principles of IHL. Conversely, the codified standards of IHL might ground the ethical ideals presented in the texts above within a contemporary context, offering clarity in accountability during warfare scenarios. Exploring potential integrations of these frameworks could yield enriched discussions about the moral landscape of war, especially in addressing unresolved ethical questions that persist in contemporary conflict. For instance, could IHL benefit from incorporating *dharma* and moral responsibility discourses in its statutory guidelines? Likewise, could the teachings from the Indian *Yudha Nīti* (War Ethos) be adapted to the challenges posed by modern warfare, making them more actionable in today's aggressive practices?

Ancient Indian military philosophy, particularly as articulated in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and *Upanisads*, provides significant insights into the formation of International Humanitarian Law

(IHL) by emphasising the ethical dimensions of warfare. The concept of *dharma* underscores the importance of moral conduct and duty, asserting that ethical behaviour remains paramount even amidst conflict, which aligns closely with IHL's core principles that aim to mitigate suffering and protect non-combatants such as women, children, and older people, during warfare. This echoes modern IHL principles, particularly the Geneva Conventions, which seek to ensure that those not participating in hostilities are treated humanely. Kautilya's insights into strategy and proportionality resonate with IHL's stipulations that aim to prevent excessive force and unnecessary suffering. Furthermore, ancient guidelines on fair combat practices reflect IHL's regulations regarding permissible means and methods of warfare, illustrating a historical precedent for contemporary legal restrictions on specific weaponry. Additionally, the emphasis on peace, negotiation, and reconciliation enriches the post-war objectives of IHL aimed at restoring order and safeguarding human rights. Nonetheless, while these historical perspectives provide a foundational understanding of the moral implications of warfare, their integration of spirituality and ethical considerations invites critical examination of how effectively they can be applied to modern conflicts, particularly in light of the complex humanitarian challenges that persist today.

V

In conclusion, achieving a holistic understanding of war ethics necessitates a concerted effort to intertwine the insights derived from ancient Indian texts on combat, such as the *Dhanurveda*, with the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The convergence of these perspectives can reinforce a collective commitment to ethical conduct, recognising the intrinsic dignity of all individuals while striving to minimise unnecessary suffering in the chaos of warfare. Yet, their divergence illustrates the intricate moral and legal dilemmas that accompany discussions of war; one approach nurtures a narrative-based morality steeped in cultural traditions, while the other establishes a pragmatic legal framework focused on enforceable standards. As contemporary conflicts continue to present profound challenges, both frameworks offer valuable contributions to the evolving discourse on warfare ethics, encouraging dialogue that addresses the moral dimensions of armed conflict. By reconciling these diverse viewpoints, we can aspire to develop a more humane approach to warfare informed by a rich outline of philosophical traditions, ultimately reshaping the ethical landscape and enhancing the frameworks guiding humanitarian law in response to the complexities of modern conflict. As the world

grappling with the challenges of contemporary conflicts, both frameworks can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of warfare ethics, paving the way for dialogue around the moral dimensions of conflict that may help shape future humanitarian law and ethical discourse. In a world where conflict remains an inevitable part of the human experience, reconciling these perspectives, a metaphor for a just life could lead to more humane conduct during warfare and a reimagined ethical landscape inspired by diverse cultural and philosophical traditions.

Notes

1. *Dhanurveda*, often referred to as the "Art and Science of Warfare," is a traditional Indian martial science that encompasses various aspects of combat, strategy, and weaponry. It is also part of ancient Indian knowledge in *Ayurveda*, *yoga*, and martial arts texts.
2. The *Yudha Niti* (War Ethos) in ancient Indian martial practices encompasses values, principles, and cultural beliefs, such as *Dharma* (Righteous Duty), Valour and Courage, Honor and Loyalty, Skill, and Chivalry associated with warrior and war. Ancient texts such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* illustrate the ideals of warrior ethos through characters like Arjuna and Rama embodying the above values through their actions and decisions in battle, reflecting the larger societal values of honour, duty, and righteousness. Often intertwined with cultural symbols, rituals, and ceremonies that celebrated heroism, it reinforced the importance of these ideals in society.
3. *Dharma* is often translated as 'righteousness,' 'moral duty,' or 'law' and represents the ethical and moral principles that govern an individual's behaviour and duties in society. It can vary based on age, caste, gender, and social situation. Thus, martial practices influenced by *dharma* would reflect these nuances: *Kshatriya Dharma* (warriors belonged to the *Kshatriya* class, which had the responsibility to protect and uphold *dharma*, i.e. engaging in martial practices was not just a skill, but a duty to protect the realm and ensure justice), 'Just War Concept' (the principles of *dharma* influencing the conduct of warfare, based on which warriors are expected to fight justly and follow ethical guidelines, such as not harming non-combatants and respecting the surrendering enemy). Practitioners would inevitably train in physical skills, self-discipline, meditation, and moral behaviour, aligning their martial practice with their *dharma*.
4. *Karma*, a fundamental concept in Indian philosophy and religion (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism), means 'action' or 'deed,' which encompasses all actions performed by an individual, whether physical, verbal, or mental. The theory of *karma* holds that every action has consequences: good actions lead to positive outcomes, while negative actions lead to adverse effects. There are different types: *Sanchita Karma* (the accumulated karma from past lives that have not yet borne fruit); *Prarabdha Karma* (the portion of

sanchita karma that is currently active and affecting one's life and represents the *karma* that is responsible for the present circumstances; and *Kriyamana Karma* (the *karma* that individuals are presently creating through their present actions, which will affect their future). *Karma* is intricately linked to *samsara*, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Therefore, the ultimate goal in many of these philosophies is to attain *moksha* or liberation from this cycle, which is achieved through good actions, spiritual knowledge, and ethical living. *Karma* emphasises personal responsibility, and individuals are encouraged to act righteously, knowing their actions will have consequences. Moral behaviour, compassion, and selflessness are often promoted to accumulate good *karma*. In summary, karma is a profound concept that promotes ethical living and accountability for one's actions. It serves as a moral guide and a philosophical framework that influences how individuals approach life, relationships, and spiritual growth.

5. The art of combat encompasses various techniques, strategies, and ethical considerations, manifesting in martial arts, military tactics, and self-defence. Traditional disciplines like Karate, Judo, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu emphasise self-defence and physical conditioning, while Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) revives medieval techniques for modern practice. Military tactics extend beyond physical confrontations, including nuanced strategic planning and psychological warfare. Self-defence approaches, epitomised by Krav Maga (a modern self-defence system developed for the Israeli military), prioritise immediate safety and awareness through instinctive movements. It empowers individuals to protect themselves and others in real-world confrontations, making it popular among military, law enforcement, and civilians seeking practical self-defence training. Nevertheless, the philosophy of combat critically examines the moral implications of violence, questioning the circumstances under which force is justified and its broader societal impacts.

6. *Jus ad Bellum Conditions* (IHL) attest to Just Cause, Right Intention, Legitimate Authority, Proportionality, Probability of Success, and Public Declaration, which collectively aim to ensure that war is a morally justifiable and proportionate response to an imminent threat or grave injustice, rather than a reckless or arbitrary use of force. It must be the Last Resort, i.e. all peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted before resorting to war.
7. *Jus in Bello Conditions* (IHL) stress upon Distinction, Proportionality, Precaution, and Prohibition of Certain Weapons and Methods. The focus on regulating the conduct of parties engaged in war: Combatants must distinguish between civilians and military targets, and attacks must be directed only at legitimate military objectives. Certain weapons and tactics are prohibited because they cause unnecessary suffering or harm to civilians, such as chemical weapons and indiscriminate attacks.

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