



Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts

Interreligious Perspectives

Edited by
Maria Power · Helen Paynter

palgrave
macmillan

Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts

Maria Power • Helen Paynter
Editors

Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts

Interreligious Perspectives

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Maria Power
Las Casas Institute for Social Justice
University of Oxford
Oxford, UK

Helen Paynter
Centre for the Study of Bible
and Violence
Bristol Baptist College
Bristol, UK

ISBN 978-3-031-17803-0 ISBN 978-3-031-17804-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17804-7>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

CONTENTS

1	Introduction to the Volume	1
	Maria Power and Helen Paynter	
2	Violence and Peace in the <i>Mahābhārata</i> and <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>	9
	Simon Brodbeck	
3	Spectres of Violence and Landscapes of Peace: Imagining the Religious Other in Patterns of Hindu Modernity	29
	Ankur Barua	
4	Jewish Interpretations of Biblical Violence	53
	Alan Mittleman	
5	A Hermeneutic of Violence in Jewish Legal Sources: The Case of the Kippah	73
	Laliv Clenman	
6	Buddhism and the Dilemma of Whether to Use Violence in Defence of a Way of Peace	95
	Peter Harvey	
7	Apologists and Appropriators: Protestant Christian Reckoning with Biblical Violence	119
	Helen Paynter	

8	Roman Catholic Teachings on Violence and Peace: The Credible Re-enactment of the Kingdom	143
	Maria Power	
9	Interpretations of Qur'anic Violence in Shīʿī Islam	165
	Ali Hammoud	
10	Sacralized Violence in Sufism	187
	Minlib Dallh O. P.	
11	The Predicament of the <i>Sant-Sipahi</i> (Saint-Soldier): Sanctioned Violence and Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition	209
	James M. Hegarty	
12	Experiences with Violence: Studying Sacred Text in Interreligious Dialogue	237
	Alisha Pomazon	
	Index	265

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Ankur Barua is university Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies at the University of Cambridge. After a BSc in Physics from the University of Delhi, he read Theology and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge, completing a PhD on the symbolism of time and embodiment in St Augustine and Rāmānuja. His primary research interests are Hindu Studies and the comparative philosophy of religion.

Simon Brodbeck was educated at the universities of Cambridge and London. He has worked at Cardiff University since 2008 and is a Reader in Religious Studies in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion. His research focuses most particularly on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. His books include *The Mahābhārata Patriline* (2009), *Krishna's Lineage: the Harivamsha of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata* (2019), and *Divine Descent and the Four World-Ages in the Mahābhārata* (2022).

Laliv Clenman is Senior Lecturer in Rabbinic Literature at Leo Baeck College, London. She is also Visiting Senior Lecturer at King's College London. She teaches and supervises MA and PhD research in Rabbinic Literature and Jewish Studies. Her research explores challenging problems in Jewish law in antiquity, with a particular focus on issues of identity, gender, violence, and the construction of rabbinic authority.

Minlib Dallh O. P. is a Dominican friar and a visiting assistant professor at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta GA (USA). His main field of research focuses on Islamic mystical tradition and he has

a keen interest in comparative mysticism, with a special focus on love-mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Ali Hammoud is a PhD candidate at Western Sydney University. He is broadly interested in Shīrism, Islamic intellectual history, and the relationship between literature and philosophy. His thesis seeks to examine the history of Shīr philosophical commentaries on Rumi's magnum opus, the *Masnavi*.

Peter Harvey who holds his doctorate in Buddhist Studies at Lancaster University, under Ninian Smart, is Emeritus Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland, UK. His research focuses on early Buddhist thought and practices, and Buddhist ethics. He was editor of *Buddhist Studies Review* (2006–2020), journal of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, having founded the Association in 1995 with Ian Harris, and from 2002 to 2011 ran an online MA Buddhist Studies program. He is author of *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (1990, 2nd edn. 2013), *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (1995), and *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Practices* (2000).

James M. Hegarty is Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions at Cardiff University. His MA and PhD studies were undertaken at Manchester University under the supervision of Jacqueline Suthren Hirst. He studied Sanskrit with Valerie Roebuck. He has an abiding interest in the role of narrative in the transmission and adaptation of religious knowledge in early, medieval, and modern South Asia. He is the author of numerous works on the role of narrative in, and between, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh tradition, which span from the Pre-common Era to the Twentieth Century.

Alan Mittleman holds a chair in Jewish Philosophy at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, where he has taught since 2004. He is the author of seven books, most recently *Does Judaism Condone Violence? Holiness and Ethics in the Jewish Tradition* (2018).

Helen Paynter is a Baptist minister accredited with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. She is tutor in biblical studies at Bristol Baptist College and director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence. She is the author of a number of books on the relationship between the Bible and violence, including *God of Violence Yesterday, God of Love Today? Wrestling*

Honestly with the Old Testament (2019), and *Telling Terror in Judges 19: Rape and Reparation for the Levite's Wife* (2020).

Alisha Pomazon is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religion and Culture at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan. Her work focuses on the history of Jewish-Christian Relations and Dialogue, textual hermeneutics, and the practices of social justice in Judaism and Catholicism.

Maria Power is Senior Research Fellow in Human Dignity at the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice, Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford. She has written widely on the conflict in Northern Ireland and the role that religion can play in peacebuilding, her most recent book, *Catholic Social Teaching and Theologies of Peace: Cardinal Cahal Daly and the Pursuit of the Peaceable Kingdom*, was published in 2020.



Introduction to the Volume

Maria Power and Helen Paynter

A so-called social experiment posted on the video channel YouTube a few years ago¹ sought to explore people's attitudes to violence in the Bible and the Q'ran. Random people walking around New York City were presented with a Bible wrapped in a Q'ran dust jacket and directed toward some texts appearing to call for violence and the subjugation of women. Most were quick to condemn the texts and distance themselves from them. Some explicitly compared them unfavourably with 'what the Bible teaches'. There was almost universal shock when the experimenter removed the

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riDlxCvFZWw> Accessed 16 May 2022.

M. Power (✉)

Las Casas Institute for Social Justice, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
e-mail: Maria.power@bfriars.ox.ac.uk

H. Paynter

Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, Bristol Baptist College, Bristol, UK
e-mail: paynterh@bristol-baptist.ac.uk

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature
Switzerland AG 2023

M. Power, H. Paynter (eds.), *Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17804-7_1

dust jacket and revealed the true identity of the text they had been sampling.

This experiment demonstrates a number of things, arguably none of them intended by the experimenter. It highlights the situation that in many parts of the world, popular opinion considers Islam to be a religion of violence. It exemplifies the fact that all the sacred texts of the world faiths contain some violence. And it shows the danger of evaluating anyone's faith based on an uninterpreted and selective reading of proof-texts.

Globally, the use of sacred texts to promote violence is one of the pressing issues of our time. In recent years, many societies and cultures have entered a new era of polarisation, in which appeals to sacred texts are made in the pursuit of political and economic gain. Further, current global events, such as the rise of groups like ISIS, and Christian fundamentalism in the United States and in Eastern Europe, place religion – and in particular attitudes to violence and peace – at the centre of global political discourse. In such instances, sacred texts may be deployed in a reductionist manner, with tropes taken out of context to enhance their popular appeal.

But alongside this, the *perception* of other people's faiths as violent and other faith's texts as deplorable, furthers suspicion, polarisation, and violence within and across communities and nations. But in actual fact, the interpretation of sacred texts by adherents of each faith is far more subtle than the popular imagination allows. Each of the major faiths has its own interpretive practices which seek to grapple with the complexities of what are generally very ancient texts. These interpretive practices may be developed in the academy or in the community; they are generally part of long traditions of interpretation within faith communities.

But just as each sacred text contains violent myths, narratives, laws, prayers and more, so they all, in various ways, call for peace. How are these apparently contradictory perspectives reconciled by interpretive communities? Is one text abrogated by the other? Does one text have interpretive control over another? Are divergent texts held in tension with one another? Is appeal made to diachronic development within the texts?

The conception for this volume arose from the editors' own grappling with these problems. Maria is a Catholic social ethicist and peace advocate, and Helen is a UK Baptist minister and biblical scholar with an interest in violent biblical texts. Positioned as we both are within the Christian faith (though within very different traditions), we are far more aware of the Church's perspectives on violence and peace than we are of the approaches taken in other faith traditions. How do those of other faiths grapple with

these matters within their own sacred texts? We wanted to learn *of* the issues and their interpretations within other faith traditions, but we also wanted to learn *from* other faith traditions about the hermeneutical approaches taken in the academy and the believing community.

We, therefore, set out to commission a range of essays which would attempt to identify some of the issues raised by the texts of the major world faith traditions and to plot something of the diversity of responses to these challenges offered by scholars and adherents. It is not possible to offer an exhaustive study of the range of approaches taken by any of the faiths here covered, but by offering two chapters for the majority of the traditions, we attempt to sketch something of the range of approaches taken.

Too often, hermeneutical work like that which is showcased here takes place within academic or confessional communities which are siloed from one another. Concern for orthodoxy (correctness of belief) or orthopraxy (correctness of practice), and perhaps for apologetics (defence of the faith) tends to drive the conversation inwards. Here, by bringing together in a single volume voices from a diverse range of faith traditions who are willing to air some of the internal struggle on these issues, we seek to break the conversation out from these siloes and to open up spaces for generative and generous dialogue. This is further facilitated by a concluding chapter which draws together some common threads and offers some ways forward.

Our first chapter on Hinduism is written by the confessionally unaffiliated Indologist Simon Brodbeck. Brodbeck examines the two foundational narrative texts of Hinduism, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, which form the basis for interpretation and reinterpretations in many subsequent Hindu writings. The causes and mitigations of violence in these early post-Vedic texts are complex and layered, and Brodbeck explores the ways in which ‘mythic’ and ‘realistic elements’ interact with one another. This is followed by a chapter written by the Hindu-Catholic scholar, Ankur Barua. Barua explores some of the ideological and contextual factors which have contributed to Hindu expressions of violence and peace from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In particular, he draws out the role of interactions between the Indian-Hindu community with Indian Muslims, and the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in that colonial and post-colonial milieu.

Our first chapter on Judaism is by the Jewish philosophical theologian Alan Mittleman. Mittleman briefly outlines the scope of the violence

within the Bible,² noting that it does not minimise the human problem of violence, but perhaps even amplifies it. Contrary to some contemporary imaginations, the embarrassment that this violence presents to faithful readers of the text is not a new issue. Mittleman therefore sketches out some ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish interpretations, with particular reference to a variety of rabbinic interpretive strategies which variously diminish, sideline, or justify violent norms. Building upon this, rabbinic scholar Laliv Clenman explores a contrastive problem: a rabbinic innovation of violence where there is no biblical precedent. This is the *kippah*, found in two early rabbinic legal works (Mishna Sanhedrin and Tosefta Sanhedrin), which was a particularly violent form of imprisonment and execution. The *kippah* was employed against the recidivist, the murderer without witnesses, and the refuser of warnings, categories of criminals for whom the normally correct disciplinary procedure proved legally impossible. It thus functioned, Clenman argues, as a solution to these hard legal cases, motivated by the desire to protect the law from destruction. Later rabbinic writings, however, tended to mitigate the human violence in these circumstances, casting it as a redundancy in the light of the inevitable divine judgment which would follow.

Our chapter on Buddhism was written by the Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey. Harvey surveys early Buddhist texts to draw out the diversity of their positions; while largely (and perhaps normatively) promoting peace, they also at times accept a limited form of violence, especially in pursuit of the *dharma* of reciprocity. He then goes on to examine the ways in which these values have been practiced in a range of historic settings, particularly the Tamil separatists in the Sri Lankan civil war. In his essay, Harvey draws out the role that religious nationalism can sometimes play in the promotion of violence, in spite of the teachings of the Buddha; and the practical irony of the perceived need to defend a peaceful religion with force.

This is followed by the two chapters on Christianity, written by the editors of this volume. First, Helen Paynter surveys themes of violence and peace within the Christian Bible. She briefly sketches some historic approaches to, and instrumentalisation of, biblical violence, before turning to the apologetic question of how the violence of the text might be reconciled with the conventional Christian view of God as all-loving.

² A terminological note is in order. Prof Mittleman and Rabbi Dr Clenman are, of course, referring to the Tanakh when they use the term 'Bible'. Dr Maria Power and Revd Dr Helen Paynter are referring to the Christian Bible when they use the same term.

Considering contemporary approaches to this question, Paynter highlights four broad lines of reasoning taken by Christian apologists, offering brief case studies for each one. None of them has proven wholly convincing to the Christian community, which continues to have diverse opinions upon the matter. This chapter's focus on mainly Protestant thoughts is followed by one from Maria Power. Power considers the development of Catholic social teaching in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which focuses on New Testament texts, particularly the Sermon on the mount, to develop a theology of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor. When considered together, these form the basis of a Just Peace theology, which is offered as a valid – and preferential – option to Just War theory. In her study of papal documents, catechisms, and writings by prominent Catholic theologians, Power demonstrates the positively reinforcing roles played by Scripture, tradition, clergy and laity in developing a teaching which is then developed contextually in a variety of settings.

Our first chapter on Islam is written by the Shīʿī Muslim and scholar of Islamic intellectual history, Ali Hammoud. Hammoud considers the ways that Shīʿī scholars have interpreted *jihad*, with an exploration of historical and textual factors which influence the argument. A significant historical moment was the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the third Imam, in 680 CE, which served to both legitimise and delegitimise certain forms of violence in subsequent Shīʿī thought. Hammoud shows how a variety of hermeneutical techniques have been applied to the Q'ranic texts by scholars within the emerging tradition, resulting in a rich diversity of interpretations within the historic and current believing community. Our second chapter on Islam is written by the Catholic scholar of mysticism in the Abrahamic religions, Minlib Dallh. Dallh examines the ambivalent relationship that Sufism has with the use of force and violence, with attention to Sufi interpretations of *jihad*. As an extended case study, he considers Ousman dan Fodio's spiritual and armed *jihad*, which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1808 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Strikingly, following the use of armed *jihad* to establish the Caliphate, dan Fodio withdrew from political leadership to remain as spiritual leader only. Hammoud draws out the complexity of the internal and external factors which contributed to this historical movement.

We then have a single chapter on Sikhism, written by James Hegarty, who is a philologist and historian of Indian religious traditions. Hegarty surveys Sikh understandings of martyrdom and religiously sanctioned

violence. He begins with an exploration of these themes in the canonical *Guru Granth Sāhib* and the *Dasam Granth*, demonstrating both continuity and discontinuity between these texts. He then turns to post-canonical writings, providing a wide-ranging survey of these themes in writings and other art forms from the eighteenth century to the present day. Through this exploration, Hegarty shows that the experience of violence (as martyrdom or religiously sanctioned action) and the theorisation of martyrdom and Sikh self-understanding are in a historic and ongoing dialectic.

The final chapter is offered by Alisha Pomazon, who brings her extensive experience in inter-religious dialogue, particularly Scriptural Reasoning, to the conversation. Pomazon ably sketches out many of the connections and distinctives of the various contributions in the book and makes a number of helpful points more generally. In particular, she highlights the power dynamics that are at work in the process of Scriptural interpretation and the role of both present community and inter-generational (i.e. historical) conversations in shaping contemporary interpretations. She points to the common theme of what might be termed the “hermeneutical spiral”. This is a term used to describe the role of sacred text in shaping praxis and the converse role of sociological, ideological and historical context in shaping the interpretation of sacred text. Like most, perhaps all, of our contributors, Pomazon sees a plenitude of interpretive options as a virtue.

And this brings us back to the case study we began with. The more that we can appreciate not only the diversity of witness within a sacred text but also the plenitude of interpretive possibilities held by adherents to that faith tradition, the less we will be inclined towards reductionist understandings of other people’s faiths. We hope that the contributions presented in this volume will aid towards that and help people both with and without the major faith traditions to appreciate the richness of the wrestling with issues of violence and peace that has gone before and continues today.

Finally, we would like to thank all our contributors for rising to the challenge of rendering complex and nuanced discussions, some of which have been ongoing for thousands of years, into a cogent and lucid précis of a few thousand words. We are grateful for their good humour and tolerance with the editing process. We would also like to express our gratitude to the editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan, for believing in this project and their help in bringing it to fruition. We dedicate this book to all those we have ever worked with who do not share our faith perspective, but who

have been willing nonetheless to share their thoughts with us and to listen to ours. May understanding grow and – to use an image from the sacred text we share with our Jewish sisters and brothers – may all swords soon be beaten into ploughshares.

Pentecost, 2022



CHAPTER 2

Violence and Peace in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

Simon Brodbeck

THE TWO TEXTS

This chapter – which I write as a devotionally unaffiliated scholar of Indology – examines presentations of violence and peace in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, the two foundational narrative texts of Hinduism, both of which include wars as integral plot episodes.¹ These

¹The *Bhagavadgītā* constitutes *Mahābhārata* 6.23–40. For the Sanskrit texts, see R. N. Dandekar, gen. ed., *The Mahābhārata Text as Constituted in its Critical Edition*, 5 vols, including the *Harivaṃśa* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1971–76); R. T. Vyas, gen. ed., *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Text as Constituted in its Critical Edition* (Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 1992). For translations, see the ‘further reading’ list at the end of this chapter. For juxtaposition and structural comparison of the two stories, see Sheldon Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki* vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 9–10, 38–42; Madeleine Biarreau, ‘Some Remarks on the Links between the Epics, the Purāṇas and their Vedic Sources’, in Gerhard Oberhammer, ed., *Studies in Hinduism: Vedism and Hinduism* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1997), 89; John Brockington, *The*

S. Brodbeck (✉)
Religious Studies, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
e-mail: BrodbeckSP@cardiff.ac.uk

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature
Switzerland AG 2023

M. Power, H. Paynter (eds.), *Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17804-7_2

two Sanskrit texts are usually dated to roughly the same period: the last few centuries BCE and the first few centuries CE. The earliest recoverable documents of these stories may have developed out of pre-existing texts and narrative traditions. Thereafter, they form a constant point of reference for Hindu thought. They are referred to and commented upon by all manner of subsequent texts. They are represented and reinterpreted in other narrative versions – other Mahābhāratas and other Rāmāyaṇas – in Sanskrit and in many other languages (now including English), and also in diverse other narrative media, for example as sculptured friezes in temples, or in ritual form as theatrical or dance performances, burgeoning in new forms in new media in different periods, but always in use as two basic cultural lenses through which to interpret the world. The two Sanskrit texts – the *Mahābhārata* credited to Vyāsa and the *Rāmāyaṇa* credited to Vālmīki – are not the primary access points to these stories for South Asians, most of whom do not know Sanskrit; and South Asians who learn Sanskrit and study these texts do so after coming to know the stories in other forms already. But the authority of the Sanskrit versions is tied up with their antiquity and allows them to stand as an orthodox paradigm, embodying a normative vision of monarchical society divided into two genders and four hereditary classes of men (brahmins, *ṣātrīyas*, *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*), classed approximately by occupation, but also by access to the *brahman*, the absolute, the sacred power behind sacred utterance. Brahmins, the teachers, scholars, and priests, through whom the gods are known and kept in favour, are presented as the highest class. Vyāsa and Vālmīki are brahmins. The brahmins help the *ṣātrīya* kings and everybody else.

Sanskrit Epics (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1–4, 28–40; Alf Hiltebeitel, ‘Not without Subtales: Telling Laws and Truths in the Sanskrit Epics’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33.4 (2005), 460–61; Alf Hiltebeitel, ‘The Archetypal Design of the Two Sanskrit Epics’, in Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, eds, *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata. Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel, Volume 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Simon Brodbeck, ‘Sanskrit Epics: The Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Harivaṃśa’, in Jessica Frazier, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies* (London: Continuum, 2011), 97–98. Brockington says ‘It is ... worth asking from the start whether designation of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as “epics” affects our understanding of them’ (*Sanskrit Epics*, 1); I eschew that designation here.

LITERARY BACKGROUND

The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are the first post-Vedic Sanskrit texts. Preceding them is the Veda, or the four Vedas, a large collection of texts that were the property of specific brahmin families and were used by them in and for their work, as they arranged, managed, and officiated at the ritual events whereby the gods are properly hosted. In the Veda, the ritual is an animal sacrifice, with a fire, guests, singing, and other entertainment. Ritual offerings are made into the fire, with the correct liturgy correctly pronounced. There is feasting, and the event is paid for by the host, paradigmatically a king, who gains specific personal rewards as a result of his generosity, particularly his generosity to brahmins. ‘The Kshatriyas acquired legitimacy from the Brahmins by giving *dana* (gifts) to the latter.’²

The Vedic texts contain details of the ritual, speculations about its meaning and power, and a treasure trove of spells and charms. The later Vedic texts contain the beginnings of much Indian philosophy, some mythological narratives, and materials on society and government, with brahmins presented as operating in partnership not just with kings but with lords of economic units down to the individual household. The same ritual function exists at all structural levels, from the household upwards. Among later Vedic texts are the Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras, ‘Codes of Law’, texts on normative pious behaviour, some of which are contemporary with the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*; indeed, the *Mahābhārata* includes sections of Dharmaśāstra within itself, and is particularly closely allied with the Dharmaśāstra credited to Manu.³ The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are in a simpler form of Sanskrit than most of the Veda; the *Mahābhārata* calls itself the fifth Veda, and it is aimed explicitly (as the

² Kaushik Roy, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia: from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

³ Patrick Olivelle, ed. (with Suman Olivelle) and trans., *Manu’s Code of Law: a Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); for shared verses, see 1009–34.

Rāmāyaṇa is implicit) at an audience of both genders and all classes, rather than at a brahmin male audience as the Vedic texts are.⁴

The Vedic texts are, among other things, a meditation on the violence done to the sacrificial animal. This aspect of Vedic texts is significant with regard to violence and peace in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. It recurs in philosophical discourse, and it has been studied at some length in various publications.⁵ The violence of the sacrificial operation is explained away in various ways, by the deification of the victim, and/or by the making of an exception. *Manu's Code of Law* states that 'Within the sacrifice ... killing is not killing',⁶ and in the *Mahābhārata* this exception is compared with the exception to the general rule of chastity:

Revelation reveals that the fires are hungry for meat, and at sacrifices brahmins always kill animals, which, being sacramentalized by the incantations, then go to heaven, as we hear. Now, brahmin, if the old fires had not been so hungry for meat, no one would eat it now. Even now the hermits rule in the matter of eating meat: 'He who always eats only after having offered to deities and ancestors according to the Ordinance and with faith does not incur guilt by eating the remainder.' Revelation reveals that one thus equals a meat abstainer: a scholar of the Veda who goes to his wife at her season remains a brahmin.⁷

⁴ Brahmins are not to teach *śūdras* the Veda: *Manu's Code of Law* 3.156; 4.80–81, 99; 8.272.

⁵ Ludwig Alsdorf, *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India* (ed. Willem Bollée, London: Routledge, 2010 [1962]); Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij, eds, *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1–183; Francis X. Clooney, 'Pain but not Harm: some Classical Resources towards a Hindu Just War Theory', in Paul Robinson, ed., *Just War in Comparative Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 110–14; Laurie L. Patton, 'Telling Stories about Harm: an Overview of Early Indian Narratives', in John R. Hinnells and Richard King, eds, *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 13–21.

⁶ *Manu's Code of Law* 5.39.

⁷ *Mahābhārata* 3.199.9–12, trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata* vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 623–24, adjusted. See also Alf Hildebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: a Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 202–9; Simon Brodbeck, 'Daśaratha's Horse Sacrifice in the Rāmāyaṇa', *Orientalia Succana* 69 (2020), 6–7, 19–20.

This analogical shift, from violence against an animal to violence against a rule of chastity, seems to bypass the context of armed violence – the military contest – which for present-day readers, after two world wars and with continuing armed violence in various parts of the world (aided by a profitable international arms-supply industry), is probably a more natural kind of context for a book on violence and peace. This chapter discusses armed violence in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, but there is a long Sanskrit poetic pedigree for the presentation of violence as a sacrificial ritual, and since the host of the rite and his priest and the sacrificial animal are all males, this links directly to the matter of masculinity, which comes to the fore in our two royal stories.⁸ The Vedic sacrifice exists within a social context where gender relations and symbols operate, and the discussion of male violence implicates the female.

KINGSHIP AND VIOLENCE

The Vedic texts contain clues as to what was happening, historically, before the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* were composed. In the *R̥gveda*, the oldest part of the Veda, there is evidence of violence between chieftains and their warrior bands, for example over cattle, and between types of people, with some enemies described in a dehumanising fashion as *dāśas* (fiends, savages, infidels).⁹ Indra, leader of the gods, is celebrated as a victor in violent conquest, in the hope of winning his support for human perpetrators. The *R̥gveda* mentions a ‘battle of ten kings’, wherein a certain chieftain’s fortunes were reversed after he changed his priest.¹⁰

⁸ Smita Sahgal, ‘Situating Kingship within an Embryonic Frame of Masculinity in Early India’, *Social Scientist* 43.11–12 (2015).

⁹ Michael Witzel, ‘R̥gvedic History: Poets, Chieftains and Politics’, in George Erdosy, ed., *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 324–26; see also Jarrod L. Whitaker, *Strong Arms and Drinking Strength: Masculinity, Violence, and the Body in Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ *R̥gveda* 7.18–19; Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, trans., *The R̥gveda: the Earliest Religious Poetry of India* vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 902–6; Witzel, ‘R̥gvedic History’, 333–37; cf. Michael Witzel, ‘The Vedas and the Epics: Some Comparative Notes on Persons, Lineages, Geography, and Grammar’, in Petteri Koskikallio, ed., *Epics, Kṛtilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures. Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas* (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 22–25.

The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* present a social vision where the *ksatriya* class has a monopoly on the use of force. The king is a *ksatriya*, and by right he uses the *daṇḍa* or rod of punishment to enforce law and order within his own realm, as well as to conquer his enemies abroad. The king's use of violence is a service to his people. It is his basic tool, the badge of his office, the pillar of his masculinity, the phallic instrument whereby he releases the fecundity of his realm by stopping the big fish from eating the little ones.¹¹ It is said that war should be a last resort, after negotiation, the giving of gifts, and the sowing of dissention.¹² But Bakker speaks of 'the right, nay the duty of the king to wage war', and says that in pre-modern times 'This right, and hence the right to stage organized killing in the interest of the state, has, to the best of my knowledge, never been questioned in the brahmanical tradition'; 'War thus seemed to some extent to be a natural phenomenon and needed no justification'.¹³ This certainly seems to be the case in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya (if Dharmaśāstra

¹¹ On the king and violence, see *Mahābhārata* 12.67–71, 93–107, 121–22; *Arthaśāstra* 1.4.3–16; *Manu's Code of Law* 7.14–31, 87–113; Clooney, 'Pain but not Harm', 114–21. For the *Arthaśāstra* see R. P. Kangle, ed., *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra, Part I: a Critical Edition with a Glossary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986 [1960]). On the *ksatriya* and violence, see *Bhagavadgītā* 2.31–32; K. N. Upadhyaya, 'The Bhagavad Gītā on War and Peace', *Philosophy East and West* 19.2 (1969), 163–66; Anantanand Rambachan, 'The Co-Existence of Violence and Non-Violence in Hinduism', *Ecumenical Review* 55.2 (2003), 116–17. For the phallic masculinity of the king, see Ariel Glucklich, 'The Royal Scepter (*Daṇḍa*) as Legal Punishment and Sacred Symbol', *History of Religions* 28.2 (1988); Sahgal, 'Situating Kingship', 9–15; Simon Brodbeck, 'Mapping Masculinities in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*', in Ilona Zsolnay, ed., *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 128–32. For the heroes' heaven, see Minoru Hara, 'Apsaras and Hero', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29.1–2 (2001); Danielle Feller, *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 288; Wu Juan, 'Comparing Buddhist and Jaina Attitudes towards Warfare: some Notes on Stories of King Ajātasatru's/Kūṅika's War against the Vṛjīs and Related Material', *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology* 18 (2015), 97–107; Jarrod Whitaker, 'Heroism, Military Violence and the State in Ancient India', in Garret G. Fagan, Linda Fibiger, Mark Hudson, and Matthew Trundle, eds, *The Cambridge World History of Violence, Volume 1: the Prehistoric and Ancient Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 689–91. Though the king saves small fish from being eaten by bigger ones (*Mahābhārata* 3.185.7–9), he does this by eating fish smaller than himself.

¹² *Mahābhārata* 12.103.22; *Harivaṃśa* 15.48–55; *Manu's Code of Law* 7.198–200; *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.61.16.

¹³ Hans Bakker, 'The Hindu Religion and War', in Anna S. King, ed., *Indian Religions: Renaissance and Renewal. The Spalding Papers in Indic Studies: Collected Papers Presented at the Annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions* (London: Equinox, 2006), 30, 33.

is a Code of Law, then Arthaśāstra is a Code for Profit), where the king is to employ violence freely as a means to achieve his ends.¹⁴ But open war is a precarious business, and the king who wishes to prevail may resolve matters to his advantage by alternative means. He should seek to prevail by any means necessary. ‘When the occasion was ripe, the king should expand his territory and fill his treasury through war’, but ‘war should be fought only when there is an opportunity to gain something without risking too much’.¹⁵ For Kauṭilya, peace and war are two sides of one coin: ‘Peace and activity constitute the source of acquisition and security. Activity is that which brings about the accomplishment of works undertaken. Peace is that which brings about security of enjoyment of the fruits of works.’¹⁶ The *Arthaśāstra*’s assessment of violence depends only on the immediate consequences, for the king, of employing it. But elsewhere, attempts were made to associate the *ksatriya* class with responsibilities as well as rights, and with specific rules of conduct, and of conduct in battle. Even if some of the rules are honoured in the breach,¹⁷ the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are conscious that their great battles should be righteous wars, in terms of both the justification for the war in the first place and the conduct of combatants during it. Messengers are not to be killed.¹⁸ Rules of combat are detailed such that, for example, chariot-warriors should fight chariot-warriors, elephant-warriors elephant-warriors, cavalymen cavalymen,

¹⁴Torkel Brekke, ‘Wielding the Rod of Punishment: War and Violence in the Political Science of Kautilya’, *Journal of Military Ethics* 3.1 (2004), partially reproduced in Torkel Brekke, ‘Between Prudence and Heroism: Ethics of War in the Hindu Tradition’, in Torkel Brekke, ed., *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilizations: a Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006); Patton, ‘Telling Stories about Harm’, 22–23; Kaushik Roy, ‘Norms of War in Hinduism’, in Vesselin Popovsky, Gregory Reichberg, and Nicholas Turner, eds, *World Religions and Norms of War* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 35–37.

¹⁵Brekke, ‘Wielding the Rod of Punishment’, 44, 49.

¹⁶*Arthaśāstra* 6.2.1–3, trans. R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra, Part II: an English Translation with Critical and Explanatory Notes* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986 [1972]), 317; cf. Brekke, ‘Wielding the Rod of Punishment’, 48; Patrick Olivelle, trans., *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 273, with ‘rest’ rather than ‘peace’.

¹⁷M. A. Mehendale, *Reflections on the Mahābhārata War* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995); Roy, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare*, 35–38; Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 244–79.

¹⁸*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.5.20; 5.50.5–6, 11; 6.67.38.

and infantrymen infantrymen.¹⁹ The duel between chariot-warriors is the standard set-piece.

More generally the king's activities are for development:

Everything must be good for cows and brahmins; one should make war for their sake. But grain should not be trampled down, nor should anyone erect any obstacles to the plowing of the fields, nor where the Gods are paid honor, the ancestors, or guests.

... He who lives here looks to the benefits of doing so. Our army will attack any who will not remit to us as they are able.²⁰

The king is frighteningly, violently powerful. Hence the necessity for his taking good counsel. Rāvaṇa, king of the monsters, is given good counsel and rejects it.²¹

SUMMARY OF MAHĀBHĀRATA

The *Mahābhārata* tells of King Janamejaya, whose father was killed by snakebite, and who set out on a ritual to kill all snakes. While the ritual was occurring, he heard the full story of the war that was fought at Kurukṣetra between the one hundred Kauravas, who lost the war, and their cousins, the five Pāṇḍavas, who won it. The victors included Arjuna Pāṇḍava, Janamejaya's great-grandfather – a great friend of Kṛṣṇa, as shown particularly in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which occurred just before the war. Janamejaya, having heard the story of the Kurukṣetra war, called off his snake massacre uncompleted, and made peace with the snakes.

Most of the *Mahābhārata* is the story told to Janamejaya. It tells of the background and causes of the Kurukṣetra war; it gives an extended

¹⁹ *Mahābhārata* 6.1.29; *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.90.4; Mehendale, *Reflections on the Mahābhārata War*, 5–8; see also *Mahābhārata* 12.96–97; Surya P. Subedi, 'The Concept in Hinduism of "Just War"', *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 8.2 (2003), 352–57; Feller, *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths*, 263–66; Brekke, 'Wielding the Rod of Punishment', 48; Roy, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare*, 26–38. Armies may not have consisted entirely of *kṣatriyas*: see *Arthaśāstra* 6.1.11; Whitaker, 'Heroism, Military Violence and the State', 685 n. 2, noting the general terms *yodha* and *yodhin* for 'soldier'.

²⁰ *Mahābhārata* 12.133.14c–15, 19, trans. James L. Fitzgerald, *The Mahābhārata* vol. 7 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 509–10.

²¹ Raj Balkaran and A. Walter Dorn, 'Violence in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*: Just War Criteria in an Ancient Indian Epic', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.3 (2012), 677–81; Clooney, 'Pain but not Harm', 18–19.

account of the battlefield action (books 6–10 of 18); and then it shows how the survivors coped with it afterwards. In narrating the history of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas before the war – the two sets of cousins always quarrelled, the kingdom was divided, the Kauravas beat the Pāṇḍavas at dice, molested their wife, sent them into exile for 13 years, and then would not give them their kingdom back – the text includes (especially in books 1 and 3) long sections consisting of stories that the Pāṇḍavas heard, including among them the story of Rāma;²² and in narrating what happened after the war, the text includes (especially in books 12 and 13) extensive teachings from the dying patriarch Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira Pāṇḍava, the new king of the reunited ancestral kingdom. Janamejaya also hears, told in the *Harivaṃśa* after the story of the Pāṇḍavas has finished, the parallel story of Kṛṣṇa, and what he got up to when he was not with the Pāṇḍavas.²³

What Janamejaya hears turns him from violence to peace. For the Pāṇḍavas, it was not so easy; they fought their war to its bitter end, after which more than a billion had been killed, and they did not live happily ever after, as Janamejaya does. Yudhiṣṭhira never got over the trauma of it. But it is made clear to Janamejaya, before and then again after the story of the Kurukṣetra war, that that war was required for the good of the Earth, who was overburdened, and that it was effected by the gods in descended form as humans.²⁴ Janamejaya's great-grandfather Arjuna was the god Indra, Yudhiṣṭhira was the god Dharma, and so forth. Before descending, the gods formed the plan of effecting a huge massacre of *kṣatriyas* for the good of the suffering Earth; but having descended they were in their human forms largely unaware of their plan as gods – apart from Kṛṣṇa, who, being Viṣṇu, knew it all, even in his human form, and made sure it was achieved.

SUMMARY OF RĀMĀYAṆA

King Rāma's sons were born and raised at Vālmīki's hermitage after Rāma had abandoned their pregnant mother Sītā. They learned the story of Rāma from Vālmīki, and they performed it to Rāma at his horse sacrifice.²⁵

²² *Mahābhārata* 3.257–75; *Harivaṃśa* 31.110–42.

²³ *Harivaṃśa* 1–113.

²⁴ *Mahābhārata* 1.58–61; *Harivaṃśa* 40–45.

²⁵ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.4; 7.84–85.

It is the story of how Rāma was exiled from his rightful kingdom for 14 years due to the machinations of his father's junior wife, and how, while Rāma was in exile, his own wife Sītā was kidnapped by the demon Rāvaṇa, and with the aid of friendly monkeys Rāma fought and won a great war against Rāvaṇa, and brought Sītā back to be his queen in the ancestral kingdom, where after his exile he ruled so very gloriously, but abandoned her due to mutterings among the people about what might have happened to her while apart from him.²⁶

Whereas the *Mahābhārata* is commonly termed an *itihāsa* or 'history', the *Rāmāyaṇa* is said to be the first *kāvya* or 'poem'. It is inspired by Vālmīki witnessing a crane crying after the killing of its mate.²⁷ Balkaran and Dorn say 'It is telling ... that poetry itself is derived from grief, and grief born of violence'.²⁸ Like Yudhiṣṭhira, Rāma does not get to live happily ever after. These two do not get peace of mind. They suffer the pains of kingship in full. But they are the best kings.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is more streamlined than the *Mahābhārata*; it includes fewer narratives incidental to the main story and fewer passages of extended teaching. But like the *Mahābhārata*, it contextualises its events, and the sufferings of its great king and his wife, within the framework of gods and goddesses doing an errand in the human world. For Rāma, like Kṛṣṇa, is Viṣṇu incarnate – these are two of the famous *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu's appearance as Rāma is due to a boon that Rāvaṇa secured long ago, that he (Rāvaṇa) would be invulnerable to all manner of beings but not to human ones, and so Viṣṇu must be in human form in order to kill him. Unlike Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Rāma spends most of the story unaware that he is Viṣṇu, this being part of the artifice whereby he can be human enough to kill Rāvaṇa.

²⁶ *Rāmāyaṇa* 7.42–51; Robert P. Goldman, 'Ādyantaḥ: the Uttarakāṇḍa's Challenges for its Authors and Readers', in Simon Brodbeck, Adam Bowles, and Alf Hildebeitel, eds, *The Churning of the Epics and Purāṇas: Proceedings of the Epics and Purāṇas Section at the 15th World Sanskrit Conference* (Delhi: Dev, 2018), 291–93.

²⁷ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.2; Simon Brodbeck, 'Who Was it Was Cursed by the First Śloka Verse?', *Religions of South Asia* 16.2–3 (in press).

²⁸ Balkaran and Dorn, 'Violence in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*', 661.

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR VIOLENCE

Both texts provide a divine justification for the specific wars that they depict. It is clearly presented, but it operates at a theological and mythological level that contrasts with the otherwise ostensibly realistic level of the narrative and the motivations of its human characters. The business of the gods is presented in two different forms – as the treatment of a demonic problem, and as the rescue of the Earth from overpopulation – but it is also presented as something that the humans involved would not understand. As soon as they are humans, the main characters who effect the wars – with the exception of Kṛṣṇa – do not know what they are doing. Thus, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa does not try to remind Arjuna that Arjuna is Indra and that he must fight as part of the divine plan previously agreed upon. After the Kurukṣetra war, Vyāsa reveals something of the divine plan in order to try to help the survivors come to terms with what has happened,²⁹ but without much success.

The Kurukṣetra war is far more devastating and problematic than Rāma's war against Rāvaṇa, and the gradual realisation that Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu may tend to lead not to acceptance of the war, but to criticism of Kṛṣṇa for having facilitated it. Such criticism is voiced by several characters.³⁰ The commentators explain Kṛṣṇa's apparent indifference to human suffering in terms of the divine plan,³¹ but opinions may differ over whether or not this explanation is satisfactory. As Allen puts it, 'there is more to *dharma* than humans and human institutions can comprehend'.³²

In both texts, there is also a human level at which a justification for violence is offered. The general justification is the abuse of a precious woman, a damsel in distress, Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* and Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; and the woman is glossed as the realm by the *Mahābhārata*'s frame story of the overburdened Earth, by the *Rāmāyaṇa* detail that Sītā is born from and named after the 'Furrow',³³ and by the standard

²⁹ *Mahābhārata* 11.8.

³⁰ *Mahābhārata* 11.25.34–46 (Gāndhārī); 14.52–54 (Uttānka); cf. *Harivaṃśa* 115.14–25 (Janamejaya).

³¹ Vishal Sharma, 'The Problem of Indifference to Suffering in the *Mahābhārata* Tradition', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 24.2 (2020), 188–96; see also Phyllis Granoff, 'The *Mausalaparvan* between Story and Theology', *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 62.2 (2008).

³² Nick Allen, 'Just War in the *Mahābhārata*', in Richard Sorabji and David Rodin, eds, *The Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 140.

³³ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.65.14–16; 2.110.27–28; 5.14.16; 7.17.30–31.