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The Mahābhārata deals with the complex concept of dharma; one's righteousness or duty. Throughout the text, the characters are faced with ethical dilemmas that challenge them to uphold morality, justice, and family obligations. Why should one care about these dilemmas? They transcend the Mahābhārata and offer insight into universal human conflicts. The ethical dilemmas in this essay shall be elaborated with particular focus on the dice game, the false statement of Yudhishtira regarding Ashwatthama, and the manipulation carried out by Krishna during the war. My argument in this analysis is that the dilemmas of the Mahābhārata reflect a difficulty in defining and upholding dharma amid conflicting duties and desires.

The dice game constitutes one of the most important moral dilemmas of the Mahābhārata. Yudhishtira, who is devoted to his commitment to dharma, finds himself torn between kingly duty (kshatriya dharma) and his moral responsibility to protect his family. Despite his awareness of Shakuni's deceit, Yudhishtira stakes his kingdom, brothers, and Draupadi, leading to her public humiliation. His disinterest in salvaging Draupadi's dignity put into focus the struggle between dharma and personal weakness. Draupadi reprimands Yudhishtira, "*O king, what dharma did you follow when you gambled me away after losing yourself?*" (Mahābhārata, Sabha Parva 2.60). It is evident that the epic condemns the decision. This moment is a perfect example

of how rigid adherence to one aspect of dharma can lead to its violation in another form. This raises many questions of the application of dharma in human decisions.

Though, there are many arguments that reinforce and back up Krishna's actions in the war. Krishna's actions are frowned upon and are seen as morally wrong, but some argue that his actions were actually to restore dharma. Krishna advises Arjuna to attack Karna when he is unarmed and later persuades Yudhishtira to lie about Ashwatthama's death to demoralize Drona (Mahābhārata, Drona Parva 7.15). These actions can be deemed as necessary to ensure the Pandavas victory and for a righteous order to be established. Krishna reflects on this perspective: "*Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, I manifest myself*" (Mahābhārata, Bhishma Parva 6.10). Krishna's statement underscores the nature of dharma; reinforcing the argument that his morally ambiguous actions were not violations of righteousness but necessary actions carried out to restore justice and ensure a greater balance. This underlines that dharma is not a rigid, one-size-fits-all concept but is adaptable to the complexities of a given situation.

However, Krishna's realism sets sights on moral relativism, undermining the principle of dharma. For example, Duryodhana points out Krishna's hypocrisy. Duryodhana says, "*What righteousness did Krishna follow when he advised Bhima to strike me below the belt?*" (Mahābhārata, Shalya Parva 9.45). While Krishna's actions achieve the desired outcome, they undermine the moral high ground and righteousness of the Pandavas. This blurs the distinction from right and wrong. This critique is a warning against the justification of unethical acts since it further contributes to the cycles of violence and hatred; weakening the principles it is meant to uphold.

The Mahābhārata portrays the ethical dilemmas as human conflicts born from relationships, emotions, and social aspects. It unfolds the complexity of the contradictions of morality, the distinction between right and wrong. The epic shows how dharma is complex and results in actions that cannot easily be deemed right or wrong. It does so with events such as the dice game and Krishna's wartime strategies. The concept of dharma challenges morality. There becomes a blurred line between right and wrong, and it is not a one-size-fits-all concept. The epic questions the values and moral systems of human beings, reminding us that the path of righteousness is not a straight one but full of contradictions and conflicts of morality. The ethical dilemmas as portrayed through the Mahābhārata teach lessons in treading life's difficulties - no matter the times.



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