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Epic honour and shame in the Mahabharata and the Iliad: Cultural reflections of warrior ethics

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Abstract: Both the Mahabharata and the Iliad examine the notions of honour and shame as major themes that drive the actions and motives of its characters, so influencing their destiny and the course of events. However, the Mahabharata emphasizes the concept of honour, while the Iliad emphasizes the concept of shame. The main aim of this paper is to discuss the Honour and Shame in the Mahabharata and the Iliad: Cultural Reflections of Warrior Ethics in which we mainly discuss about the importance or role of honour and shame and cultural values through customs in both the epics. It is stated that the Mahabharata and the Iliad explore the significance of honour and shame in shaping character motivations and societal values. While the Mahabharata ties honour to dharma and duty, the Iliad emphasizes personal glory and reputation. Despite cultural differences, both epics highlight how the pursuit of honour often leads to conflict and loss, offering timeless lessons on ethics, duty, and the consequences of human choices.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Iliad, honour, shame, culture, cultural value, customs, dharma

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INTRODUCTION

In the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*, honour and shame are fundamental concepts that drive the plot and impact character motives. These epic poems are not only literary masterpieces, but also reflections on society ideals and intellectual questions of the period. They provide profound insights into the moral and ethical systems of ancient Indian and Greek civilisations. These works are not just literary marvels; they also act as mirrors reflecting the moral, ethical, and sociological ideals of ancient Indian and Greek civilisations.

In the *Mahabharata*, honour is inextricably linked to the notion of *dharma* (just duty or moral law). Characters like *Yudhishthira*, *Arjuna*, and *Karna* negotiate difficult moral landscapes where personal honour and social standards often collide. The concept of shame is equally profound, as seen by *Draupadi*'s public humiliation and *Karna*'s illegitimate birth.

The *Iliad*, set during the Trojan War, emphasizes the heroic code of honour (*timē*) and avoidance of shame (*aidos*). Heroes like as *Achilles* and *Hector* want glory and renown, yet their acts and choices are motivated by a dread of disgrace. The epic delves into the ramifications of injured honour and the unrelenting desire of eternal renown.

Shame and honour are major elements in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*, influencing the characters' motives, actions, and consequences. In these epics, a warrior's reputation and feeling of self-worth are linked to his honour, while shame acts as the motivator for retribution, justice, and atonement. Although

both books investigate comparable subjects, their representation reflects the values of their different cultures—ancient Indian *dharma* (*righteousness*) and Greek heroic ideals (*kleos*, or glory).

SECTION TITLE 2

Honour and shame

Honour and shame are universal concepts; nevertheless, their precise definitions change depending on the prevailing social norms and values of any given time. **(Cairo and Oman. Unni Wikan, 1984)** These two ideas are not always diametrically opposed. Honour, in its widest definition, may be seen as a blend of intrinsic value (self-esteem) and external value (fama), the latter of which can be tarnished by dishonourable deeds. Such actions might be carried either by the people involved or by an outside force that aims to humiliate them. **(Michael Herzfeld, 1980)** Among the aristocratic classes at the *time* when crusading emerged, peer assessment was synonymous with honour and disgrace. A mix of qualities, including military prowess, aristocratic lineage and reputation, financial resources, and generosity in sharing those resources, were used to evaluate them. The Christian code of conduct known as "the Davidic ethic" was to serve as a model for the nobility **(Nigel Saul, 2011).** But honour and shame were imprecise concepts. Groups with common identities could have various standards for what constitutes acceptable conduct and appearance based on factors such as socioeconomic position, race, gender, and religion. Some thought was also given to external factors, however depending on the tolerance of one's peers, one's actions might lead to acceptance or expulsion from the group, depending on whether it was commendable or humiliating. Unless they take action to rehabilitate themselves, this exclusion can persist.

Since mediaeval society was still mostly visual and oral rather than written, the public character of honour and shame is essential to comprehending how individuals were compelled to maintain their social ties. Public displays of devotion, such as homage, investiture, or accepting the cross, were used to build and regulate social connections. Additionally, justice and repentance (penance) were handled in public. **(Rowbotham, Murayeva and Nash, 2013)** Nonetheless, the popularity of songs and histories that chronicled the actions of aristocratic people and families was rising, and they had the potential to influence customs related to honour and shame, particularly if they were documented. Knightly conduct was also restricted by the notion of preserving daring actions for future generations or, worse, gaining a permanent reputation for shame. To a certain degree, these textual illustrations supplemented the reforming principles of chivalry that crusading embodied. The two main purposes of rhetoric, which "the ideology of the crusade … provided the perfect structure for," were praise and reproach. Both academics and poets were schooled in this tradition.

Honour and Shame in Ancient Texts

Existing research underscores the centrality of honour and shame in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*. In the *Mahabharata*, honour is intricately linked to *dharma*. Alf **Hiltebeitel**, in his extensive studies, emphasizes how *dharma* encompasses various aspects of duty, *righteousness*, and moral obligations. The pursuit of *dharma* often places characters in dilemmas where their honour is at stake. For example, *Yudhishthira*'s adherence to *dharma* leads to his participation in the fateful dice game, resulting in the public shaming of *Draupadi*.

In the *Iliad*, honour (*timē*) and shame (*aidos*) are foundational to the heroic ethos. Gregory Nagy's "The Best of the Achaeans" explores how the heroes' pursuit of honour defines their social identities and actions. *Achilles*' withdrawal from battle due to perceived dishonour and his subsequent return to avenge *Patroclus* exemplify the critical role of honour and the fear of shame. The *Iliad* portrays the Greek heroes as deeply concerned with their legacy and the judgment of their peers.

IMPORTANCE OR ROLE OF SHAME AND HONOR IN BOTH EPICS

Importance or Role of Shame and Honor in the *Mahabharata*

In the *Mahabharata*, honour is inextricably linked to *dharma* (moral responsibility) and social standing. *Draupadi*'s humiliation before the Kaurava court is one of the most evocative instances of shame having far-reaching ramifications. When *Yudhishthira* loses a dice game, stakes, and loses *Draupadi*, Dushasana seeks to publicly strip her. This conduct is an assault not just on *Draupadi*, but also on the Pandavas' collective honour. *Draupadi*, in her fury, questions the legality of the gamble:

> *"How could a man who has already lost himself stake his wife in a bet?"* (Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Sabha Parva, Section LXVI).

This incident is essential because the Pandavas' inability to defend her dishonours them, fuelling their thirst for revenge. Bheema, unable to act at the time, subsequently vows:

> *"I swear that I shall drink the blood of Dushasana for what he has done to Draupadi!"* (Debroy, *The Mahabharata*, Volume 2).

Similarly, *Karna* has felt humiliation his whole life because of his unknown heritage and social rank. He is mocked as the son of a charioteer and continuously denied the respect he desires. His answer is to join forces with Duryodhana, who promotes him to kingship, enabling him to pursue honour via loyalty and fight. However, *Karna*'s participation in *Draupadi*'s humiliation, which includes calling her a whore (Buitenen, The *Mahabharata*, Book 2), exacerbates his mental anguish, and he admits his mistake before dying.

The *Mahabharata* demonstrates that honour is linked not just to personal pride but also to moral responsibility. *Yudhishthira*'s regret at having gambled everything away contrasts with *Arjuna*'s initial reluctance to engage in the battle. When *Arjuna* raises reservations about murdering his relatives, Krishna tells him:

> *"For a warrior, nothing is higher than a war against evil. To waver in this is shameful."* (Bhagavad Gita 2.31, Easwaran translation).

This event supports the concept that honour is tied to doing one's duty, even when confronted with personal tragedy.

Importance or Role of Shame and Honor in the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* emphasises the importance of honour (*timē*) and shame (*aidos*) for warriors. *Achilles*, the greatest Greek warrior, is profoundly wounded when *Agamemnon* steals Briseis from him:

> *"You shameless, profiteering excuse for a commander! How are you going to get any Greek warrior to follow you into battle again?"* (Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, Fagles translation).

Achilles' retirement from war is the result of this dishonour. His action had a significant influence on the Greek army, resulting in casualties. However, after *Patroclus* is murdered by *Hector*, *Achilles*' guilt at not defending his closest ally reignites his feeling of responsibility. This grief-driven honour drives him back into the fight, resulting in *Hector*'s death.

Hector, on the other hand, feels shame in a different way. When *Achilles* finally meets him, *Hector* temporarily loses confidence and escapes:

> *"Hector would not stand his ground, but left the gates behind and ran in fear."* (Homer, *Iliad*, Book 22, Lattimore translation).

This act contradicts his earlier courage and is observed by the Trojans, compounding his humiliation. However, *Hector* regains his composure and confronts *Achilles*, eventually dying with honour. His dying comments demonstrate his concern for his legacy rather than personal survival:

> *"I beg you, let my body be ransomed, so my people may give me proper rites."* (Homer, *Iliad*, Book 22).

Priam, *Hector*'s father, suffers even more humiliation when he begs *Achilles* for his son's corpse. Despite being a king, he had to humble himself before his enemies:

> *"I have done what no man before has ever done—I have kissed the hands of the man who killed my son."* (Homer, *Iliad*, Book 24, Fagles translation).

This particular scenario is among the most significant passages in the *Iliad*, since it demonstrates that honour and shame are not limited to the battlefield alone, but rather transcend into the realms of personal and political behaviour as well.

Comparing the Role of Shame and Honor in Both Epics

It is shown in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad* that honour is the driving force behind the conduct of warriors, whilst shame is a potent impetus for vengeance and atonement. These issues, however, are approached in a different manner by the two epics. While the *Iliad* presents honour as a personal quest tied to individual glory (*kleos*), the *Mahabharata* establishes a connection between honour and *dharma*, which refers to an individual's obligation to society, family, and *righteousness*.

For instance, the humiliation of *Draupadi* is portrayed as a moral failing on the part of a whole civilisation, which ultimately results in the Kurukshetra war being portrayed as an act of justice. On the other hand, *Achilles*' humiliation is a personal insult that causes him to withdraw from the war, which ultimately results in huge casualties before he eventually returns.

In addition, shame is more closely associated with bravery on the battlefield in the *Iliad*, in contrast to the *Mahabharata*, where it is often associated with duty (as evidenced in the many predicaments that *Yudhishthira* and *Arjuna* encountered). *Hector*'s moment of terror is considered to be his greatest

dishonour, but *Priam*'s act of imploring *Achilles* is seen as something that is very humiliating but ultimately inevitable.

The implications of honour and disgrace are not limited to individuals in either of the epics; rather, they stretch to whole civilisations. Both the Trojan War and the Kurukshetra War are fought over themes of pride, treachery, and *righteousness*, demonstrating that these principles were important to the heroic traditions of both the Greeks and the Indians.

CULTURAL VALUES IN THE MAHABHARATA AND ILIAD

Cultural values in *Mahabharata*

Values

The way the Mahābhārata was adopted, adapted, translated, retold, and re-created in every part of India, including "tribal" areas, is evidence of the success of the cultural integration efforts undertaken by the Epic, which gives every jana the right to "own" the great story. As a result, the Epic takes extra care to include as many regions and ethnic groups as possible, and the latter more than returned the favour.

Let's examine the South, which is distant from the epicentre, as an example: The narrative mentions Cōḻas, Pāṇḍyas, and Dravidas; Sarangadhwaja, king of the Pāṇḍyas, fights with the Pāṇḍavas in the conflict; and inscriptions show that the Cōḻas and Cera rulers proudly claim ancestry from the solar or moon dynasty. On behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, a Pāṇḍya monarch commanded the elephant army during the Great War, according to an inscription; other sources claim that early Pāṇḍyas translated the Mahābhārata into Tamil, but the translation has since been lost. Additionally, it is believed that during the Bhārata battle, Udiyanjeral, the first named Cera king, lavishly fed the soldiers on both sides.

Let's not assume that higher castes are the only ones who "own" the Epic. In the isolated Shola Forest of the Nilgiris, we locate a hero stone that tells the story of the Pāṇḍavas. Kurumba tribal people keep it in a modest shrine **(Benagudi Shola, pp. 108–09).** The caverns known as "*Pañca Pāṇḍavar Pārai*," or *"the rock where the five Pāṇḍavas [stayed],"* are located further south, close to Kodaikanal. In several Tamil Nadu temples, Draupadī is also revered. There have been reports of similar customs from the central Himalayas, Kashmir, the Northeast, etc. In fact, there aren't many places in India where there isn't some indication that the Pāṇḍavas or Rāma passed there.

The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata together created a cultural network that spread over the subcontinent and, eventually, to Southeast and Central Asia. The two Epics created a holy geography while disseminating important ideas of Indian civilization, such *dharma*, karma, and reincarnation, over this whole cultural realm more widely than the Vedas or the Upanishads.

The institution of pilgrimage, which embedded the sacred geography of India in the land, is more important than the Great War or the Pāṇḍavas' campaigns (all the way to Afghanistan). Whether we consider the twelve Jyotirliṅgas, the Chār Dhām holy sites, which are conveniently located at the "*four corners*" of India (Badrinath, Rameswaram, Dwarka, Puri), the Kumbhamelā network (originally at twelve locations), or the fifty-one or fifty-two Shakti mahāpīṭhas, the goal is clear: encourage people to travel around the country

following the paths of the gods or heroes, allowing them to socialize and get to know other Janas. The resultant tapestry has been lively and rich, and it reflects a cultural unity that lies underneath the language and ethnic variance. At a period when emphasizing this fundamental commonality was not yet considered a crime of *"jingoism" or "communalism,"* Nehru once admitted this:

> *Everywhere I found a cultural background which had exerted a powerful influence on their lives. This background was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myth, and legend, and it was not possible to draw a line between any of these. Even the entirely uneducated and illiterate shared this background. The old epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and other books, in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it. Illiterate villagers would know hundreds of verses by heart and their conversation would be full of references to them or to some story with a moral, enshrined in some old classic.* ***(Jawaharlal Nehru, p. 67)***

In spite of the fact that a great number of academics and non-academics have spent years attempting to show or deny the "*historicity*" of the two Epics ***(Shastri, Mitra, 2004),*** they have often neglected the far more significant role that the integration of India's sociocultural variety plays in the process. Therefore, regardless of whether or not these two works include historical information, they were the ones who created history.

Customs

The diverse customs and traditions that ruled ancient Indian civilization are reflected in the *Mahabharata*. Individuals' lives were significantly shaped by social hierarchy, with society divides dictating one's position and responsibilities. One essential component of social organization was the categorization of people according to their vocation, which affected interactions and possibilities. The difficulties experienced by certain characters who aimed to go beyond their assigned tasks demonstrate how this system, which was intended to preserve order, actually resulted in limitations. According to Krishna in the *Udyoga Parva*:

> *"One's varna is determined by deeds, not by birth."* (*Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 36*).

The epic's marriage customs show a diversity of marital arrangements, from ones based on personal preference to ones decided by familial ties. The idea that compatibility in marriage went beyond income or position was shown by the frequent usage of talent or bravery tests in the spouse selection process. *Karna* is rejected by *Draupadi* in her swayamvara, stating:

> *"A sutaputra (son of a charioteer) is unworthy of my hand."* (*Mahabharata, Sabha Parva, Chapter 173*).

This is a reflection of the dominant social status-related marital norms. In several instances, unusual marriage arrangements developed as a result of extraordinary events, highlighting how traditions may be modified to meet social or divine demands.

In both personal and political life, religious events were important. To prove their legitimacy and obtain

heavenly graces, kings would undertake elaborate rituals. These rituals often functioned as symbols of power, strengthening the link between governmental duties and religious commitments. Krishna says at the ritual that *Yudhishthira*'s *Rajasuya Yagna* is an example:

> *"The Rajasuya elevates a king above all others, proving his supremacy over the land."* (*Mahabharata, Sabha Parva, Chapter 4*).

In addition, traditions that were associated with education and mentoring emphasized the significance of knowledge. For example, students were required to show their appreciation to their instructors by performing acts of respect and service. An illustration of this idea is provided by the tale of Ekalavya, who presents Dronacharya with his thumb in the capacity of guru dakshina. (*Mahabharata, Adi Parva, Chapter 132*).

Warriors were supposed to adhere to a set of moral standards during combat. Fairness and honour were the guiding ideals of combat, and involvement was strictly regulated. *Bhishma* clarifies:

> *"A true warrior does not strike the weak, the unarmed, or those who surrender."* (*Mahabharata, Bhishma Parva, Chapter 12*).

Although these principles were intended to guarantee morality in combat, incidents of deviance show how difficult it may be to uphold moral principles during hostilities. Characters were regularly forced to make tough choices due to the conflict between duty and personal ethics, as seen in the Bhagavad Gita by *Arjuna*'s reluctance to fight his own relatives:

> *"Better to live in this world by begging than to kill the noble teachers and elders."* (*Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 5*).

A society's customs are its long-standing behaviours that are often carried down through the generations. Ancient Indian norms, especially those pertaining to marriage, social structure, war, rites, and government, are reflected in the *Mahabharata*.

Cultural Values in the *Iliad*

Values

Homer's *Iliad* is a seminal work of Western literature that, in addition to its epic confrontations and valorous contests, provides insight into the cultural ideals of ancient Greek civilization. The poem depicts a realm ruled by the tenets of honour (*timē*), glory (*kleos*), loyalty, destiny, divine will, and societal duties. These principles influenced the behaviours of its characters and the anticipations of Greek soldiers, monarchs, and deities. The *Iliad* not only recounts a conflict but also provides insight into the Greek perception of life, death, and their cosmic significance.

1) Honor (*Timē*) and Glory (*Kleos*)

The quest for honour and glory is a core cultural ideal in the *Iliad*. *Timē*, as used by Greek soldiers, denoted their individual honour as determined by their combat accomplishments, belongings (such as war spoils), and the regard they received from their peers. As it lowered one's social status, losing honour was

seen as a destiny worse than death.

Glory, or *kleos*, was equally significant. *Kleos* made guaranteed a warrior's name would be remembered for centuries, in contrast to *timē*, which reflected current status. A magnificent death was preferred over a lengthy but boring life since a hero's actions were remembered via poetry and narrative.

When *Achilles* decides to participate in the Trojan War even though he knows it will result in his early death, he exemplifies this ideal. He is reminded of his destiny by his mother, Thetis:

> *"If I stay here and fight, I'll never return home, but my glory will be undying forever."* (*Iliad*, Book 9, trans. Fagles).

Achilles puts his immortal glory ahead of his safety, demonstrating how engrained *kleos* was in Greek society. On the other hand, *Hector* eventually acknowledges his position as Troy's best defender, despite his first fearful flight from *Achilles*, saying:

> *"Better to stand up to Achilles, kill him, or die with honor before my city."* (*Iliad*, Book 22, trans. Lattimore).

Both fighters show that the ultimate goal of a Greek hero is to die in combat with honour.

2) Loyalty and Brotherhood

Greek warriors placed a high importance on loyalty, both to their fellow soldiers and to their city-state (polis). Friendship and family ties were revered, and betrayal was seen as dishonourable. The bond between *Achilles* and *Patroclus* most exemplifies this virtue.

When the Greeks are fighting the Trojans, *Achilles*' best friend *Patroclus* dons *Achilles*' armour and goes into combat. *Achilles* is devastated by his death at *Hector*'s hands and grieves:

> *"I have lost the heart for battle. Not a single thing could matter more to me than this grief."* (*Iliad*, Book 18, trans. Fagles).

Achilles' final return to battle is driven more by his desire to exact revenge on *Patroclus* than by a sense of obligation to the Greek cause. His anger at *Hector* and his unwillingness to give the Trojans back *Hector*'s corpse serves as an example of how Greek soldiers believed that they had a duty to exact revenge when their fellows were killed or dishonoured.

3) Fate (*Moira*) and Divine Will

The *Iliad* depicts a world in which human destiny is determined by the will of the gods and fate (*moira*). The Greeks believed that while people had free choice, their final destiny was predetermined and unalterable. Despite their best efforts, heroes are unable to avoid their destiny.

The lord of the gods, Zeus, often uses his golden scales to measure the fortunes of soldiers. Zeus concludes that *Hector*'s *time* has arrived when he and *Achilles* battle:

> *"Then father Zeus held up his golden scales and placed two fates of death upon them."*

(*Iliad*, Book 22, trans. Lattimore).

Not even the gods can totally change destiny. Even though she is divine, Thetis is unable to prevent *Achilles* from dying as he is supposed to. The Greek idea that people must accept their mortality and strive for greatness within the bounds of fate is reinforced by the focus on fate.

4) Respect for Enemies and the Dead

The *Iliad* preserves the traditional value of honouring adversaries, especially in death, despite the savagery of combat. One such example is how *Hector*'s corpse was handled. In an act of extreme cruelty, *Achilles* drags *Hector*'s body behind his chariot after killing him, depriving him of a proper funeral. Denying someone a burial was considered the height of dishonour by the Greeks. Nevertheless, this deed is ultimately denounced, and when the Trojan king arrives to demand the return of his son's corpse, *Achilles* is affected by *Priam*'s entreaty:

> *"I kissed the hands of the guy who murdered my kid, something no man has ever done before."* (*Iliad*, Book 24, trans. Fagles).

Even the strongest warriors must honour their dead enemies, as *Achilles* demonstrates when he returns *Hector*'s corpse in response to *Priam*'s mourning. Even in times of conflict, this exchange emphasizes the value of empathy and the recognition of our common humanity.

5) Hospitality (*Xenia*) and Social Obligations

The religious obligation to provide for visitors, known as hospitality (*xenia*), was highly valued in Greek society. It was believed that breaking *xenia* was very disrespectful to the gods. Despite the *Iliad*'s focus on conflict, there are instances of hospitality that serve as a reminder to readers of Greek ideals outside of combat.

Diomedes and Glaucus's encounter in combat serve as one illustration. They choose to honour this relationship by sharing armour rather than engaging in combat after realizing that their forebears were guest-friends:

> *"Let us avoid each other's spears, even in battle. There are enough Trojans and Greeks for me to slay."* (*Iliad*, Book 6, trans. Lattimore).

This scene symbolizes the power of hospitality, implying that links of kindred and guest friendship might transcend even conflict.

Customs

In that era's culture, men's lives were greatly influenced by customs and traditions. Everyone was supposed to abide by the laws they established. The monarch or possibly the gods punished those who didn't. The following are some significant traditions that are common throughout *Iliad* society:

It was customary to provide libations and sacrifices to the gods. Humans made offerings to the gods, primarily animal sacrifices, wine offerings, pricey robes, etc., in an effort to gain the favour of the gods,

placate (calm down) irate gods, succeed in a particular endeavour (such as a war victory), or even ensure that there should be no hindrance or obstacle in the completion (smooth functioning) of a task, journey, etc. Because it would bring them great agony, humans were hesitant to offend or enrage the gods. Because negligence or error may anger the gods, much care was given while completing the offerings of the sacrificial ceremonies. The gods may also get enraged if a pledge is violated if rituals are not performed correctly. The epic contains several allusions to libations and sacrifices offered to many gods. In order to appease the god who had been causing the Greeks to suffer from grief and mourning in the form of plague, the first was the sacred offering of oxen made to Apollo on behalf of the Greeks, particularly *Agamemnon*, who had insulted the priest of Apollo and had previously refused to give him back his daughter Chryseis. Here is a description of the sacrifice:

> *In order to respect the deity, the holy gift of oxen was promptly placed around the well-constructed attar. The guys picked up the sacrificial grains after washing their hands. "Hear me, Apollo, lord of the silver bow, protector of Chryse and holy Cilia, mighty ruler over Tenedos!" said the priest Chryses, raising his hands in prayer. I prayed to you before, and you listened. You respected me and dealt the Greek army a serious blow. Now give me another wish and rid the Greeks of the dreaded sickness.*
>
> *So, he said a prayer, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. After saying their prayers and throwing the grain over the victims, they yanked back the animals' heads, slashed their necks, and skinned them. Then, for the god's part, they took off the thigh bones, wrapped them in fat folds, and layered raw flesh from the remainder of the animal on top. The elderly priest burned these pieces on wooden spits while pouring libations of red wine over them, and the young men gathered around him, holding five-pronged forks. After the god's part was burned by fire, they ate the offal before carving the remaining victims into little pieces, piercing them with skewers, roasting them carefully, and drawing them all off.*
>
> *No one went without a fair portion as they feasted when their labour was over and the dinner was prepared. After their thirst and hunger were sated, the young men filled the mixing bowls to overflowing and proceeded to pour wine into each cup for a libation to the gods. He listened with excitement as the young Greek soldiers sang and danced for the remainder of the day to please the god with a lovely song honouring the Archer Apollo. (Jones and Rieu, Homer- The Iliad, 2003, p. 16-17, Bk. 1, 448-475)*

Later, *Hector* refuses to serve Zeus sparkling wine with dirty hands, claiming that a man cannot pray to Zeus while covered in blood and filth. Then, at *Hector*'s persuasion, Hecabe presents the goddess Pallas Athene the longest and most elaborately designed gown in her home, as well as a dozen year-old heifers that have never worked, in exchange for the goddess's protection of the Trojans. Furthermore, the wall and trench created by the Greeks to shelter their ships did not remain long since they neglected to make outstanding gifts to gods, ensuring a safe sanctuary for themselves and the immense prizes they had stolen. The wall was created without the favour of immortal gods, hence its impending demolition by the gods is mentioned.

The customs of the *Iliad*'s society include the dowry, or presents given by the bride to her husband, as well

as the bride price, or goods given by the suitor to the parent. The dowry that *Andromache* took with her to her marriage is supposedly rather substantial. If the enemy had caught Lycaon and Polydorus alive, *Priam* claims that his lover, Lady Loathe, may utilize the enormous dowry that her father, old Altes, gave her to pay ransom. If *Achilles* will relinquish the quaiTel and return to fight, *Agamemnon* pledges to marry him off with one of his three daughters and provide a great dowry—more than anybody has ever given—before. While Echecles wed Polymele, a stunning dancer and the mother of Eudorus, for an undisclosed sum, Polymele was slain by God Hermes, the many-eyed monster. Echecles then brought Polymele home with him. Furthermore, rather than offering him the hand of Cassandra, *Priam*'s lovely daughter, Othryoneus had pledged to achieve great things in war and drive the Greeks away.

The social gestures, greetings, and handling of one another were all subject to established norms. Forms of speech and conduct were regulated. These were somewhat different for each social class. Men, particularly rulers and heroic warriors, were required to speak with gravity and politeness in council and in all their contacts with one another. At home, they welcomed all visitors with open arms and sent them on their way with generous presents. As one example, when the embassy sent by *Agamemnon* to *Achilles*—which included Phoenix, Ajax, and Odysseus—reached *Achilles*' hut, the Greek hero immediately rose from his seat and advanced toward the messengers. He reached out and said, *"Welcome, my dear friends!"* as he extended his hand to them. (Homer—The *Iliad*, 2003, p. 149, Book 9, 196) and wanted to know why they were there. After that, he escorted them inside his shack and had them sit down. In addition, he requested that *Patroclus* bring them bread, pork, and wine. After quenching their thirst and filling their appetite, they began to converse.

The practice of the victor snatching the armour, weapons, and even horses from the defeated was commonplace during battles. Both the deceased and his own side would have thought this was a sign of disrespect. Because of this, it was common for the winner to attempt to take the victim's armour, weapons, etc., as a wealthy and beautiful prize for himself and his side. However, the dead man's friends and allies would often step in, leading to still another conflict over the body; the longest of these occurred in Book 17, involving *Patroclus*'s body. During his farewell address, the champion bragged about his triumph and rained sarcasms on his fallen opponent. As *Hector*'s charioteer Cebriones plummeted "like a diver" from the chariot after being stoned by *Patroclus*, the latter had earlier mocked him by stating:

> *"O heavens!" As it turns out, this Trojan was only briefly active. He dives so easily; it looks like he's working in the fishy seas. This man alone would bring joy. Even though it "were a storm," he can leak oysters out of a sail for twenty men. He does this job very well, and there are many like him in Troy. (Chapman, The Iliad-Homer, 2003, p. 274-275, Bk. 16, 677-682)*

I n *Iliad* culture, the buying and selling of slaves was a regular practice. Both men and women were purchased and sold into slavery (together with the other goods), clearly at a greater price than the others, including those who were members of the aristocratic class (captives of town raids). For instance, in Lemnons, *Achilles* sold Lycaon, the son of *Priam*, to Jason's son after capturing him during a night*time* assault. From there, Eeition from Imbres ransomed him for a hefty sum. When *Achilles* stormed Tenedos, Nestor gained the lovely Hecamede, the daughter of the fierce Arsinous. She is seen making and serving Nestor and Machaon drinks in Nestor's hut. Even *Hector* was afraid and concerned about his wife

Andromache, believing that she may be enslaved after his death and the capture of Troy. Therefore, the epic has many examples of both men and women slaves working hard and taking care of their masters' needs, both at *Priam*'s home and in the Greek camp.

CONCLUSION

The Mahabharata and the Iliad, as epic narratives, offer profound insights into the interplay between honour, shame, and the ethical frameworks of their respective cultures. Both texts illustrate how these values serve as driving forces behind the actions, motivations, and ultimate fates of their central characters. While the Mahabharata intertwines honour with dharma, emphasizing duty and moral righteousness, the Iliad places greater weight on personal glory (kleos) and the fear of disgrace (aidos) in shaping the decisions of its heroes.

Despite their cultural differences, both epics present honour as a powerful motivator, with shame acting as a catalyst for retribution, justice, and redemption. The Mahabharata's emphasis on dharma extends honour beyond individual warriors to the broader societal fabric, while the Iliad's portrayal is more centered on personal reputation and heroic legacy. However, both works illustrate that the pursuit of honour often comes at great personal and societal cost, leading to devastating wars and irrevocable loss. Ultimately, these epics continue to offer valuable lessons on duty, pride, and the consequences of moral and ethical choices, making them enduring literary and philosophical masterpieces.

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