

Traditional Stories as Possible Vignettes in the Research of Moral Judgement: A Preliminary Report Using Stories from Mahabharata

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Abstract

The most prevalent stimuli for exploring moral judgement in laboratory settings are small vignettes in the form of moral dilemmas. These dilemmas, mostly borrowed from the field of philosophy, are often criticised for lacking ecological validity due to their confined outcomes, hypothetical physical harms, focus on one character and overlooking cultural aspects. These criticisms are especially implicative for Indian culture which may have a different perspective on morality due to cultural prerogatives, encouraging collectivism as opposed to individualism of the West. Moreover, Indian culture often incorporates hints of ancient traditions and tales in a subtle but extensive way. We wished to probe this complex paradigm of moral judgement in the Indian context empirically by qualitatively analysing the responses and exploring the corresponding ratings of 60 participants, employing 10 selected stories from the Mahabharata. A preliminary report of the analysis is presented here. While the ratings varied considerably for

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similar judgements, the qualitative results indicated a complex amalgamation of emotions, reasons, intuitions and cultural influences. The scope for using epic stories to understand moral judgement, in the context of contemporary society, is discussed. The findings further encourage questioning the relevance of culture and issues of the ecological validity of vignettes.

Keywords

Moral judgement, moral vignettes

Introduction

Morality may be considered as a field of 'hybrid inquiry' incorporating both ethical theories and psychological facts (Doris & The Moral Psychology Research Group, 2010, p. 1). Moral judgement has obtained research attention from both philosophers and psychologists. It refers to 'evaluations (good vs. bad) of the actions or character of a person that are made with respect to a set of virtues held to be obligatory by a culture or subculture' (Haidt, 2001). A review of psychological research on morality reveals that laboratory and simulated settings using stories as stimuli are most commonly employed to elicit moral judgement (Knutson et al., 2010). These often come in the form of vignettes representing moral dilemma as variations of classical dilemmas used in philosophy (Foot, 1978; Thomson, 1976, 1985, 1986). For example, the dilemma in the trolley problem entails deliberately killing one to save many. Several stimuli with variations in context, complexity and directness of harm have been tried (Cushman, 2008; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Moore, Clark, & Kane, 2008; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2006). These dilemmas, however, have been criticised for lacking ecological validity (Knutson et al., 2010). Moreover, the confined outcomes and assumptions were found to be unacceptable by many participants (Bennis, Medin, & Bartels, 2010).

Such criticisms are especially implicative as Indians may have a different perspective of morality due to cultural prerogatives, including greater weightage on collectivism as opposed to individualism (Hofstede, 1983) and belief in fate. Moreover, there is also a dearth of methodological consensus about identification and control of relevant variables in the literature on moral judgement (Christensen & Gomila, 2012).

Most of these Western classical dilemmas provide only two response options involving hypothetical physical harms, ignoring several other vital premises such as fairness, purity and so on. Thus, in spite of ensuring good experimental control, it misses some real-life options. Some of such options would be loaded with cultural meanings. For example, surrender to the will of God is a common solution to moral dilemma in India. Such surrender may alter the nature of agency and hence the conflict within the participant. Since situational and cultural aspects are crucial to moral cognition (Casebeer & Churchland, 2003), the forced choice format may not be appropriate to grasp the complexity and uniqueness of the Indian moral fabric. Moreover, moral judgements evoked by forced choice dilemmas involving unusual situations may prompt uncommon strategies and cognitions that are perhaps inapt in real-life situations (Escobedo, 2009, as cited in Knutson et al., 2010; Moll, Zahn, de Oliveira-Souza, Krueger, & Graffman, 2005, as cited in Knutson et al., 2010).

In this context, we wanted to prepare a set of vignettes based on traditional Indian stories involving moral issues applicable to Indian context.

A preliminary report of the preparation of the set of vignettes is presented here. The stories were evaluated on a scale of moral judgements to understand if they capture moral thought and orientation of the participants with reference to traditional Indian values. This may further permit the study of diverse factors operative in arriving at a judgement. The details of the aspect of morality judged in each story may serve as a guideline to select stories for research work in the future.

There is diverse literature about how one arrives at a moral judgement. Some theorists advocate the role of automated, uncontrolled, unconscious and intuitive processes (Haidt, 2001; Mikhail, 2000; Shweder & Haidt, 1993). One influential theory in this regard is the social intuitionist model or SIM (Haidt, 2001). SIM proposes that one arrives at a moral judgement without being aware of the reasons behind it. Thus moral judgement is uncontrolled and unconscious. Others claim that it is precipitated by a slow, deliberative and controlled process (Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 1983). Greene and colleagues (Greene et al., 2001; Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004) accommodated these two premises within a dual process theory, based on the results of neuroimaging studies. They held that there are two separate systems in the brain for emotional and rational processing. Each involves different neural networks. The nature of judgement depends on which system is involved. If the rational system is employed, moral

judgements are slow, controlled and effortful, leading to utilitarian judgements. If the emotional system is involved the reasoning is automated, intuitional and uncontrolled. Narvaez (2010) argued that intuition and reason were like 'partners in dance' (p. 171) in which one may lead to other. Graham et al. (2013) proposed the moral foundation theory incorporating five universal foundations: (a) harm/care which includes virtues such as kindness and compassion, (b) fairness/reciprocity, (c) ingroup/loyalty, (d) authority/respect and (e) purity/sanctity. These five moral foundations are based on Shweder's three ethical domains (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987) in that harm/care and fairness/reciprocity are linked to the domain of autonomy, ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect are associated with the domain of community and purity/sanctity belongs to the domain of divinity.

Christensen and Gomila (2012) have systematically reviewed the literature on different behavioural and neuroimaging studies using dilemmas as vignettes and concluded that 19 parameters need to be considered for optimum results using dilemmas as stimuli. Knutson et al. (2010) advanced three normative parameters for vignettes to facilitate the easy and parsimonious selection of stimuli. These norms, namely, social affect, intentionality and norm violation, are based on a pool of moral vignettes (concerning episodic memory) assembled by Escobedo et al. (2009, as cited in Knutson et al., 2010). Factor analyses revealed that norm violation, involving the transgression of norms that encourages group function and unity, accounted for most variance. Social affect representing the degree of emotionality and aversion emerged as the second factor. The third factor was the intention that the protagonist had and planning involved in the act. The vignettes were based on real-life episodic memory preserving ecological validity, circumventing the drawbacks of the classical dilemmas. The elimination of vignettes based on religious morality in the original work by Escobedo et al. (2009, as cited in Knutson et al., 2010) was a limitation of the study.

Morality in India is a layered phenomenon, incorporating social, cultural and religious components. Ancient Indian concepts identify two types of morality: *Karma* (deed) and *Dharma* (justice) (Smith, 1991). The word 'dharma' initially represented the moral base of the society and later assumed religious connotations (Matilal, 2002; Pandey, 2011). The collectivist orientation of Indian culture is reflected in its traditional stories and epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, tales in the Panchatantra, traditional folktales and so on that emphasise greater good, sacrifice for others, shared values and importance of

family values unlike Western literature accentuating individual achievements, exemplified by the Iliad and the Odyssey (Triandis, 1990, as cited in Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006). Thus the typical Western dilemmas used for studying moral judgements often describe the act from a single person's perspective, divulging little or no information about the others and failing to address some salient sociocultural considerations, especially the tendency towards holistic perceptions of situations in India. Therefore, to study the pattern of moral judgement of people in a society largely subscribing to collectivist orientation, classical vignettes are perhaps not an ideal stimuli.

The Mahabharata as a Source of Vignette

Mahabharata, the great Indian epic, was written between c400 BCE and c400 CE (Singh, 2008). Its authorship is attributed to sage Vedavyasa but in its present form it may be a work of multiple contributors. The relevance of the Mahabharata as a social and spiritual text has been recognised by philosophers and Indologists (Chakrabarti & Bandhyopadhyay, 2014; Chakravarti, 2006; Matilal, 2002). There are several plots and subplots where different domains and degrees of morality are indicated and these are further open to multiple interpretations. In most of the interpretations there is a concern for greater good surpassing self-interest and personal goals, thereby incorporating the promotion of collectivism. The role of Krishna, not limited to God, but also a leader and a friend, perhaps subsumes Shweder's ethic of divinity. According to Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997), divinity expresses the

Indian belief that a sacred order is immanent in the world, and that godliness permeates and interpenetrates the human social order as well as natural world and interacts with both and that there are important communicative exchanges going on all of the time between persons and the realms of divinity (p. 147).

This incorporation of the sacred order in everyday life is often overlooked and bypassed in studies of Western vignettes of moral decision-making. God in the Indian system is often a close friend or family member of the common people, participating in daily decisions. This gives a twist to moral judgement not available in the West and has motivated us to choose the Mahabharata as one source of vignettes.

Method

The present research was cleared by the departmental committee responsible for ethical and methodological issues.

Our aim was to prepare a set of vignettes based on stories from the Mahabharata so that they can serve as possible stimuli in studying moral judgement in Indian context.

Sample: Sixty participants volunteered as expert judges of the stories. They were divided into two groups.

1. Senior experts: Thirty voluntary participants (15 females and 15 males, age group: 45–65 years) who were either faculty (philosophy, psychology, English, Bengali and Sanskrit) or associated with administration and legal fields (working in judicial, police or administrative posts like heads of institutions or administrative services), free from age-related degeneration, constituted the senior expert group. It was assumed that people from these job profiles would have relatively greater analytical orientation with regard to moral judgement. Each expert had at least 15 years of experience in their respective jobs.
2. Student experts: Thirty voluntary participants (15 females and 15 males, age group: 18–23 years, 15 undergraduates and 15 post-graduate students) from different disciplines and six different colleges and two different universities of Kolkata constituted the student expert group.

All participants were Hindus with Bengali as their mother tongue and were proficient in reading and writing Bengali. They were free from major chronic physical illness or disability, were reportedly not on any psychotropic medication and had no police records. This information was recorded as a preliminary check against possibility of impairment of the ability to judge moral implication, though of course it was not fool-proof. Ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of the two groups of participants were homogenous. The educational background and age groups for students were similar while for the expert group it was according to their job profiles.

The senior expert group was selected by means of purposive sampling and the student experts by the cluster sampling method from six different colleges and different streams—science, humanities, commerce and vocational courses.

The work progressed in the following stages.

Stage I: Amassing a Pool of Stories and Editing for Selecting a Final Ten

Initially a pool of 20 stories was selected, representing different aspects of morality based on male-to-male aggression. Morality not being a unitary concept, the incorporation of female characters often invites a tinge of sexual morality, which would make stories more complex than we can handle at the moment. Thus stories with female characters were not considered.

Three source books were primarily consulted: the literal Bengali translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata by Kaliprasanna Singha, an abridged but authentic Bengali version by Rajsekhar Basu (2007) and an English retelling of the story of the Mahabharata by Devdutt Pattanaik (2010). From the pool of stories, 10 were selected for judgement by experts. The language was paraphrased in contemporary Bengali with the help of experts in Bengali, so the basic information was not changed, but intelligibility was adequate. The following criteria were considered for selecting these 10 stories.

1. Each story progressed through maximum five stages of sequential events from the beginning to the end.
2. Each story was self-contained, with a complete set of information and conclusion.
3. The perspectives of the characters of the story were expressed and not the writer's.
4. Information/content of each story was controlled as far as practicable to eliminate the reference to past knowledge. However, since the Mahabharata is a widely read and filmed epic, the scope of this was limited.
5. Stories that were too long (that had more than five stages and with descriptive content more than 200 words in length) were eliminated.
6. Stories involving magical/supernatural elements were eliminated.
7. Stories with male-to-male aggression and no female characters were considered.

Two experts of Bengali literature edited the final 10 stories to ensure that these vignettes did not exceed 200 words and that the language was lucid, free of any preordained moral implication (e.g., if the original story read 'killed wrongfully' then the edited version had 'killed') and also free of obsolete or Sanskritised jargon. While preparing the content

as well as presentation for response, the impact of possible relevant variables as stated by Christensen and Gomila (2012) was considered as far as practicable.

Each story was presented in printed form using the same fonts and styles. The order of presentation of the 10 stories was initially decided through randomisation and then kept constant for all. The participants were asked to rate the degree of immoral elements and moral conflicts on two separate 11-point graphical scales for each story. Reasons for ratings were obtained separately for each story as far as practicable. We did not want the characters to be evaluated separately and requested the participants to evaluate the whole story per se for possible elements of immorality and moral conflict. A re-rating session was undertaken 30 days after the first rating session and more than 90 per cent of concordance rate was observed.

Stage II: Interaction with the Participants and Obtaining Their Judgement

The data were collected in the following phases.

1. Rapport establishment and obtaining consent: The participants were clearly explained the focus of the work and their role in judgement. After settling all queries, an informed consent form was signed. The confidentiality of identity and response were ensured. Subsequently, a questionnaire on demographic information was presented.
2. Data collection: A stimulus booklet, containing 10 stories, 2 separate 11-point graphical scales and the following written instructions (roughly translated here from Bengali), was given.

The idea of morality and immorality is perceived differently by different people. The present work aims at understanding these different viewpoints on morality. You will be given ten small stories taken from the Mahabharata. Please judge and rate the amount of immoral elements/content and moral conflict in each story separately on the two eleven- point scales (one scale for immoral element and the other for moral conflict).

- Immoral Element/content is reflected by the presence of any unethical actions in the story. On the scale, 1 represents the lowest degree (absence) of immoral element and 11 represent the highest degree. 5 is the neutral point indicating neither moral nor immoral.

- Moral Conflict occurs when:
 - a. The characters seem to be right at times and wrong at other times in the same story
 - b. The characters themselves speak of moral conflict or divergence
 - c. The characters that are immoral/ unethical may be justified from some alternate angles
 - d. The content of the story may be interpreted from both good and bad angles.

On the scale, 1 represents the lowest degree (absence of) and 11 represents the highest degree of moral conflict.

Please judge and rate each story separately on these two scales. If you feel that either immoral element or moral conflict is unclear or absent you may also mention that. There is no time limit. After rating, please elaborate the reason as to why you judge a story on a specific point of the scale. Finally, please state if you were already familiar with the story or not in each case. If you face any difficulty, please report.

Intuitional and deliberative processes are not totally impervious to each other and often hints of both were present while arriving at a judgement, although their relative investment in different cases of the judgement might have differed. Since we wanted a free play of both the intuitive and deliberative judgement processes, no time limit was imposed for reading, rating and explaining their rating for each story. They were allowed to give either written or verbal responses, though most preferred to write. Verbal responses were recorded and transcribed.

Stage III: Treatment of Data

Emphasis was given on qualitative analysis of data. However, some quantitative analysis was also undertaken to supplement it.

1. Quantitative Analysis: Since the results were obtained as rating points, quantitative treatment had problems. However, several literatures using Monte Carlo simulation and similar methods provide support for employing parametric statistics to ordinal data (Baker, Hardyck, & Petrinovich, 1996, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). Brown and Daniel (1990) pointed that what is critical is how the ratings are used to understand the issue under study. The means, standard deviations and familiarity index of all the ratings for each story were found out

separately for the immoral element and for moral conflict. To examine if the stories clubbed together in terms of meaning, principal components analysis with varimax rotation was done to elicit the factor structure underlying the ratings, separately for immoral elements and moral conflicts.

2. Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analyses (Braun & Clark, 2006) of verbal/written explanations for ratings were undertaken. We settled for a detailed thematic analysis of the entire data set as a useful approach for probing this under-researched area where participants' responses are unknown (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The major steps undertaken for qualitative analysis were the following.

1. Familiarising with Data: It was achieved by transcription and repeated active reading.
2. Generating Initial Codes: 'A code is the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). We adopted an inductive or data-driven approach instead of any pre-existing coding system as it facilitates emergence of a more vivid picture of the factors considered important by the participants. The data extract for each story was coded separately using a summary table. Then the extracts and codes of all responses for a single story were used for further analysis.

The initial codes were generated using the semantic approach. The original expressions used by the participants were retained while coding. Since all the responses were in Bengali (with some common English words interspersed), the units for coding were also in Bengali, translated in English for this article only. For example, in *The Beetle Bite*, one participant said, 'Karna lied' and another said, 'deceiving a teacher is immoral'. Both expressions were retained during initial coding. Later the codes (K lying/deceiving) were clubbed together as a subtheme of 'lying and deception'. In *The Thirty-two Marks*, one participant remarked, 'Arjuna's killing of his son is immoral. He should have sacrificed himself' while another said 'human sacrifice, that too of a son by a father is immoral...in spite of having the (identifying) marks he himself did not go'. Both statements were placed under two codes, as 'killing of son by father' and 'Not sacrificing oneself in need'.

Often while discussing the reasons for identifying immoral elements, moral elements and qualities surfaced as reference points. For example, in *The Beetle Bite*, participants often said 'Karna was dedicated towards his teacher' or in *The Service Fee*, responses like 'Ekalavya was respectful towards his teacher' were common. In some stories like *A Friend in Need* and *The Death of Dronacharya*, no moral elements were apparent.

Sometimes, hints of immoral elements, not indicated earlier, surfaced during the discussion of conflict. These were incorporated in the category of element, by consensus of researchers.

For moral conflict, we identified the underlying doubts of participants as observed in the story content, even if s/he expressed it in form of judgement. For example, in *The Beetle Bite*, the teacher's curse ensured the death of Karna who had lied about his caste. One participant said: 'Of course Karna did lie, but that does not deserve death punishment'. This was interpreted as conflict: lying is bad, but is death the punishment justified for that? On some occasions, one statement consolidated both immoral element and conflict. For example, 'Dronacharya crippled Ekalavya just because he promised to Arjuna', (*The Service Fee*). This extract was coded once for immoral elements (harming a person) and once for conflict (harming an innocent person vs. keeping a promise).

Relating the incidents or characters to a previous knowledge set was also observed. For example, statements like 'the war of the Mahabharata was undertaken to restore morality and balance in society' or citations from the Gita about agency or responsibility were quite common (*The Chariot Wheel*, *The Duel* and *The Thirty-two Marks*). The role of Krishna was often evaluated in context of his godhood. Krishna, who is a widely worshipped religious figure among Hindus, had engaged in a number of apparent moral transgressions in the whole epic. When such issues were encountered, the act was sometimes justified as coming from God, and sometimes perceived as worse than others, because it represented moral transgressions by God himself. Sometimes, the context of the entire story of the Mahabharata was used to justify the target transgressions. For example, the fact that the *Pandavas* had taken some immoral stances during the battle was often cited as justification for the nocturnal attack of Ashwatthama on the unsuspecting innocent sons of the *Pandavas* (*The Attack on Pandava Camp*).

3. Searching for Themes: Different codes were combined using a summary table. The codes were combined to identify possible themes.
4. Reviewing Themes: The relevance of the 'thematic map', thus obtained, to the research question was ensured. Steps (2) and (3) were repeated rigorously until an exhaustive set of coding was generated. All relevant data extracts were categorised under at least one subtheme and the process continued till the researchers were satisfied about the exhaustion of all relevant extracts, their coding and their placement under appropriate themes.
5. Naming Themes: The themes were named appropriately taking into account the nature of the components involved.
6. Report: The report focused on the themes reflected by each story and their relevance to the research problem.

Results

The Results of Quantitative Analysis

We performed some quantitative analyses as presented in Tables 1–4.

The same transgression has been judged and rated differently by different participants, indicating the complex nature of moral judgement (refer to Tables 1 and 2). Table 3 indicates that there is little overlap among the five factors, each containing two stories. Upon examining the content, the five factors for immoral elements were named as:

1. violation of war ethics (*The Duel and The Death of Dronacharya*);
2. harm to a younger person by a father figure due to adherence to dubious principles like casteism and superstition (*The Beetle Bite and The Thirty-two Marks*);
3. breach of trust towards an unsuspecting victim (*A Friend In Need and The Service Fee*);
4. killing the helpless (*Kaushik's Probity and The Chariot Wheel*, the first being negatively signed as the killing was endorsed); and
5. issues of sanctioned aggression (*The Attack on Pandava Base and The Chakravyuha*).

Three factors of moral conflict emerged (see Table 4), but there was overlap in case of two stories, namely *The Death of Dronacharya*, which had similar loading on the first and third factors, and *The Beetle Bite*,

Table 1. Percentage of Agreement on Each Point of the Rating Scale for Immoral Elements/Content

Stories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>The Beetle Bite</i>	0.0	3.3	3.3	5.0	1.7	3.3	5.0	20.0	21.7	30.0	6.7
<i>A Friend in Need</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	11.7	38.3	41.7
<i>The Chariot Wheel</i>	1.7	1.7	0.0	1.7	1.7	11.7	6.4	11.7	10.0	26.7	26.7
<i>The Service Fee</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	3.3	15.0	18.3	61.7
<i>Kaushik's Probity</i>	38.3	10.0	6.7	13.3	13.3	6.7	6.7	1.7	0.0	0.0	3.3
<i>The Duel</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	6.7	8.3	15.0	21.6	20.0	20.0	6.7
<i>The Thirty-two Marks</i>	1.7	3.3	3.3	3.3	6.7	0.0	5.0	8.3	11.7	13.3	43.3
<i>The Attack on Pandava Base</i>	3.3	1.7	1.7	1.7	5.0	6.7	8.3	16.7	16.7	28.3	10.0
<i>The Death of Dronacharya</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	8.3	6.7	30.0	53.3
<i>The 'Chakravyuha'</i>	25.0	6.7	11.7	6.7	3.3	3.3	5.0	8.3	11.7	13.3	5.0

Source: The author.

Table 2. Percentage of Agreement on Each Point of the Rating Scale for Moral Conflict

Stories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>The Beetle Bite</i>	1.7	6.7	5.0	8.3	10.0	18.3	13.3	13.3	13.3	8.3	1.7
<i>A Friend in Need</i>	55.0	1.7	5.0	6.7	1.7	3.3	10.0	6.7	3.3	5.0	1.7
<i>The Chariot Wheel</i>	33.3	0.0	3.3	3.3	6.7	13.3	11.7	8.3	15.0	5.0	0.0
<i>The Service Fee</i>	43.3	3.3	5.0	8.3	10.0	3.3	8.3	8.3	3.3	3.3	3.3
<i>Kaushik's Probity</i>	58.3	3.3	8.3	3.3	5.0	3.3	3.3	3.3	6.7	0.0	5.0
<i>The Duel</i>	3.3	1.7	5.0	10.0	11.7	10.0	11.7	18.3	6.7	21.7	0.0
<i>The Thirty-two Marks</i>	43.3	6.7	10.0	0.0	11.7	3.3	6.7	6.7	6.7	1.7	3.3
<i>The Attack on Pandava Base</i>	30.0	5.0	5.0	3.3	8.3	6.7	13.3	16.7	6.7	3.3	1.7
<i>The Death of Dronacharya</i>	48.3	3.3	8.3	6.7	10.0	10.0	6.7	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0
<i>The 'Chakravyuha'</i>	65.0	3.3	5.0	3.3	6.7	6.7	5.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	1.7

Source: The author.

Table 3. Factor Structure of Ratings for Immoral Elements: (Principal Components and Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalisation)

Stories	Rotated Component Matrix				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>The Duel</i>	0.879	-0.162	-0.017	-0.012	0.125
<i>The Death of Dronacharya</i>	0.757	0.186	0.006	0.149	-0.073
<i>The Beetle Bite</i>	0.102	0.840	-0.245	0.129	-0.047
<i>The Thirty-two Marks</i>	-0.083	0.767	0.298	-0.026	0.151
<i>A Friend in Need</i>	0.282	0.009	0.812	0.029	-0.093
<i>The Service Fee</i>	-0.284	0.006	0.726	0.025	0.099
<i>Kaushik's Probity</i>	-0.003	-0.063	-0.264	-0.753	-0.057
<i>Chariot wheel</i>	0.124	0.025	-0.175	0.722	0.016
<i>The Attack on Pandava Base</i>	-0.023	-0.148	0.030	0.333	0.800
<i>The Chakravyuha</i>	0.081	0.353	-0.016	-0.256	0.737

Source: The author.

Table 4. Factor Structure of Ratings of Moral Conflicts (Principal Components and Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalisation)

Stories	Rotated Component Matrix		
	Component		
	1	2	3
<i>The Duel</i>	0.787	0.214	-0.037
<i>The Chariot Wheel</i>	0.763	0.139	0.246
<i>Attack on Pandava</i>	0.751	0.056	-0.174
<i>Death of Dronacharya</i>	0.573	0.037	0.531
<i>The Beetle Bite</i>	0.482	-0.480	0.143
<i>Kaushik's Probity</i>	0.052	0.771	0.135
<i>The Service Fee</i>	0.294	0.667	0.103
<i>The Thirty-two Marks</i>	0.070	0.601	0.135
<i>A Friend in Need</i>	-0.047	0.062	0.720
<i>The Chakravyuha</i>	0.049	0.207	0.692

Source: The author.

which had similar loading on the first and second factors. The loading of these two stories was also relatively low. From examination of the content, the three factors may be identified as:

1. transgression and killing within the context of war: the immorality of war itself;
2. personal obligations or community traditions versus humanity: flexibility/tolerance issues (intolerance and rigidity encouraged and justified in *The Beetle Bite*) and
3. victory versus harming the helpless.

However, we felt that even conceptually the first and third factors were close to each other.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis involved a thematic analysis of the reasons stated by the participants. After a detailed open coding of elements, the sub-themes were clubbed to form a meaningful theme. One example of

initial open coding clubbed to form an overarching theme is exemplified as follows: ‘Dronacharya’s demand for fee without teaching (*The Service Fee*), Parashurama’s overemphasis on caste and not merit (*The Beetle Bite*) were combined under the theme of “Breach of trust and Violations of Duty/Expectation Within Relationship”’. Several themes surfaced.

It may be mentioned that themes of specific reasons for immoral elements and moral conflicts overlapped as the justification of immorality often decided the degree of conflict. Thus these themes are mentioned separately merely for clarity and not for identifying different water-tight areas.

Themes of Immoral Elements

1. Violations of Truth: This signifies the principle that one should not indulge in a lie or deception (*The Death of Dronacharya*). Typical examples included ‘Karna was purposefully lying, lying to a teacher is a grave misdeed’ (*The Beetle Bite*) and ‘Calculated lying to achieve something who is immoral’ (*The Death of Dronacharya*). However the utilitarian aspect of truth was also questioned in some instances (*Kaushik’s Probity*). However, this element was not evident in factor analysis.
2. Breach of Trust and Violations of Duty/Expectation Within the Relationship: Certain relationships or status were presumed to have some implicit demand of non-harm. Violation of these constitutes immorality, especially where one is older and the other young enough to be his son. There should be respect and surrender on the part of the young and protection and benevolence on the part of the older person (*The Beetle Bite* and *The Service Fee*: teacher–student and *The Thirty-two Marks*: Father–son). There should also be trust between friends and they should protect each other from harm (*A Friend in Need*). Responsibilities associated with particular roles were also discussed. For example, a teacher should treat all his students equally, irrespective of caste (*The Beetle Bite*).
3. Violations of War Ethics: These involve violation of a number of principles in a lawful battle or *Dharmayudha*: unlawful interference in a duel (*The Duel*), nocturnal fighting (*The Attack on Pandava Base*), attacking the unarmed/unprepared (*The Chariot Wheel*) and so on. Though these were appropriate for warfare of the ancient times, the question of basic moral correctness prevailed.

4. Violations of the Principle of Reciprocity/Exchange: These include asking for something in return without actually contributing, for example, Dronacharya asking for fee from Ekalavya without teaching (*The Service Fee*). The issue of severity of the demand amounting to permanent incapacitation or even death was also discussed while rating.
5. Agency and Responsibility: According to the Gita, acts are predetermined and often are results of past activity (the cycle of *Karma*). Thus, killing was often perceived as a predetermined divine act to restore law, order and justice as advocated by the Gita. Autonomy of decisions was also questioned as many transgressions were advised by Krishna himself, leading to the repeated debate over the relative responsibility of the planner versus executioner. This calls for responsibility as a relevant variable (Christensen & Gomila, 2012) in this pool (*A Friend in Need*, *The Chariot Wheel*, *The Duel* and *The Thirty-two Marks*).

Major Reasons Cited/Issues Considered for Specific Ratings of Immoral Elements

1. Context: The contextual justification of the war by citation of the proverb 'all is fair in love and war' was quite common. Violation of War ethics resulting in death (*The Chariot Wheel* and *The Death of Dronacharya*), unlawful interference and mutilation (*The Duel*) or even human sacrifice in need of victory (*The Thirty-two Marks*) were judged less stringently than issues in the civil context like deception (*The Beetle Bite*) or permanent incapacitation (*The Service Fee*).
2. Intentionality: Intentions behind the transgression both by the perpetrator and by the victims determined the stringency of judgement. Hence, voluntary acts of self-sacrifice reduced the immorality of the perpetrator. Perceived severity of immorality was decreased if the act aimed at serving a greater good or a noble cause. Thus, Karna's lying was justified by his desire to learn (*The Beetle Bite*) and Ekalavya's mutilation (*The Service Fee*) was justified by their voluntary self-sacrifice. Blame is, indeed, a moral judgement where agency, intentionality and obligation play a critical role (Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2012).
3. Antecedent Events: Promises and vows taken earlier (Dronacharya promised Arjuna uncontroversial excellence in *The Service Fee* and Kaushik vowed the truth in *Kaushik's Probity*) and retribution of the past offense by present victims (e.g., Dronacharya had been immoral earlier) were cited frequently. The justification often

involved previous knowledge about characters that were absent in the stories presented.

4. Specific Roles: Harm inflicted by the father, teacher and friend invited stringent ratings as they were considered to be a breach of premonition of such roles.

Themes of Moral Conflicts

A greater degree of conflict reflects a possibility of openness to multiple interpretations of transgressions. Major moral conflicts were as follows.

1. The Nature of Lie: Issues pertaining to the nature of lie when it is not directly harmful or even serves a noble purpose (*The Beetle Bite*) were raised. The deception of Yudhisthira was interpreted by some as a mere twisting of fact, with no active harm or killing (*The Death of Dronacharya*). The utilitarian aspect of lie versus vows was also highlighted in some instances (*Kaushik's Probity*).
2. Between Roles/Role Requirements: When a character plays multiple roles involving multiple responsibilities, the relative importance of one role over another was asserted, for example, the teacher versus administrator (*The Beetle Bite*), father versus warrior (*The Thirty-two Marks* and *The Chakravyuha*) and so on. Issues of role requirements were also discussed. For example, as a warrior, one may have to overrule fatherly affection (*The Thirty-two Marks*). Mentions of social roles (e.g., Kshatriyas comprised the warrior class and hence killing by them was sanctioned) associated with particular social status were found.
3. Ethics of Transgression and Killing Within the Context of War: The immorality of war itself, incorporating the violation of human rights, was cited by many participants. Adhering to principles of truth and humanity versus war-related requirements (*The Death of Dronacharya*), the topic opportunities versus ethics during war to achieve victory (*The Chariot Wheel* and *The Attack on Pandava Base*) was debated. Culture-specific norms such as casteism (Kshatriyas were sanctioned to kill by virtue of being the warrior class), obedience of elders/figures of authority like Krishna (*The Chariot Wheel*, *The Duel* and *The Death of Dronacharya*) and sacrifice for victory (*The Thirty-two Marks*) surfaced in many responses. Many participants asserted that disobedience of supreme figures like Krishna (who is often perceived as God) would itself be a transgression and thus misdemeanour by Arjuna or Yudhisthira was a mere mark of respect and obedience (*The Duel* and *The Death of Dronacharya*).

4. Priorities Versus Humanity: In the civil context, the prioritising of other issues such as vows over humanity (*The Service Fee*), violation of discipline over integrity and the dedication of students (*The Beetle Bite*) was conveyed.

The Departures from Classical Dilemmas

Certain unique themes emerged which are inadequately represented by Western traditional dilemmas. For example, the issue of casteism is perceived from different angles (*The Beetle Bite* and *The Service Fee*). Overemphasis on caste discrimination (especially because it is acquired by birth and not earned) in education was perceived as immoral and unacceptable to some while few participants referred to the present-day prevalence of the caste-based reservation system by the state. According to one participant, caste discrimination in education in ancient India finds parallels in present-day admissions to elite schools of the city where parental profiles are of salience. The time frame of Mahabharata was also used as a justification for caste discrimination.

Another predominant theme concerns the differential perceptions of relationships. A teacher is a father figure. Thus, deceiving a teacher (*The Beetle Bite* and *The Death of Dronacharya*) received stringent judgement. Similarly, a teacher's active role in harming a student was also questioned (*The Beetle Bite* and *The Service Fee*). On the other hand, the roles and responsibilities of a student were also observed critically. While the dedication of a student (*The Service Fee*) and a son (*The Thirty-two Marks*) was considered as a great virtue by many participants, some dubbed this act of sacrifice as a 'foolish one'.

The issue of sanctioned aggression was encountered which is unique to each culture. For example, caste discrimination was a sanctioned practice in ancient Indian communities and expectations associated with a certain role are integral to the Indian psyche. Typical Western dilemmas are more individualistic in nature and provide limited scope for such moral thoughts.

The impact of previous knowledge was evident in the citation of the Gita on the agency of responsibility. Krishna was not a mere character but sometimes perceived as a God and transgressions by God are inadmissible to many. Many held that the responsibilities in any wrongdoing were equally shared by both the planner and the executor. Moreover executing Krishna's orders were often dubbed as inevitable (and not mere obedience) since these acts were predetermined and fated according to the Gita, thereby diminishing the perceived responsibilities of the executing agencies.

Besides identifying Krishna as a 'God', some participants equated his position with that of a *guru* (teacher) and philosopher.

These departures invite greater scope for probing the multiple view-points pertaining to a single issue. The ratings as well as qualitative analysis indicate that lying to a teacher is almost equally immoral as killing (*The Beetle Bite* and *The Chariot Wheel*). On the other hand, the killing of Abhimanyu was perceived by some as an inevitable event as it was his 'lacuna' that he could not learn the skills properly and was 'unprepared'. Thus different moral transgressions may actually be perceived to be arranged hierarchically. The scope of capturing such diverse arenas employing existing dilemmas or other vignettes is quite limited in Western vignettes.

We also wanted to explore if the pool corroborated to the moral foundations. The summary of the features of the stories and the possible relevant variables associated with each are indicated in Table 5.

Discussion

The themes surfaced ensnare a wider premise of moral judgement, surpassing fixed choices and mere idea of physical harm. Social, situational and cultural factors which influence moral judgement (Casebeer & Churchland, 2003) may be addressed by these stories.

The efficacy and feasibility of the stories to be vignettes for exploring moral judgements may further be defended on the following premises.

1. Contextualisation of morality and issues of collectivism surfaces.
2. The ability of the present generation to relate spontaneously to these vignettes which incorporate traditional values, reflective of a cultural aspect, is present.
3. Possible relevant variables, namely different kinds of transgressions, trade-offs, directness of harm, intentionality, kinship and justification (Christensen & Gomila, 2012), have been considered as well as Knutson et al.'s (2010) normative parameters of intention and norm violation.
4. The provision of open-ended choices is present.
5. An idea of the hierarchy of different types of transgressions is present.
6. At least four moral foundations (Graham et al., 2013) are hinted and some aspects of scope for purity/sanctity are also present, thus capturing a wide panorama of moral thoughts.

Table 5. Summary of Results for the Ten Stories

Stories	Mean Ratings of Immoral Elements	Mean Ratings of Moral Conflicts	Emergent Themes	Relevant Variables	Possible Moral Foundations	Familiarity
I. <i>The Beetle Bite</i>	8.3	5.8	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of truth and relationship (Teacher-student) and reciprocity.</p> <p><i>Moral Conflicts:</i> About the nature of lie, between roles (teacher vs. administrator), priority versus humanity (discipline vs. desire to learn).</p>	Intentionality, trade-off and directness of harm	Fairness/cheating (deception, severity of Parashurama's curse) Authority/subversion (disregard for norm/rule set by Parashurama) Care/harm (cursing a student, endurance of pain)	97%
II. <i>A Friend in Need</i>	10.1	3.5	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of duty/expectation from a relationship (harming a friend), agency and responsibility.</p> <p><i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Between roles (friend vs. politician).</p>	Intentionality, directness of harm (indirect harming through others)	Fairness/cheating (harm by a friend) Care/harm (killing)	76.67%
III. <i>The Chariot Wheel</i>	8.8	5.3	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of war ethics, agency and responsibility.</p> <p><i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Ethics of transgression and killing within the context of war.</p>	Directness of harm, intentionality	Fairness/cheating (deception, violating said norms of war) Authority/subversion (obedience of orders) Care/harm (killing)	100%

IV. The Service Fee	10.3	3.8	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of relationship/duty (teacher-student), Violation of reciprocity (asking for fee without teaching). <i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Between Roles/role requirements (teacher ensuring Dronacharya was the teacher of the <i>Pandavas</i>, hence ensured their best) along with conflicts of priority versus humanity (duty/vows).</p>	Trade-off, directness of harm	Fairness/cheating (from a social exchange point, asking for fee without teaching) Authority (obedience by Ekalavya) Loyalty/betrayal (loyal to Arjuna by keeping his promise) Care/harm (suffering and incapacitation of Ekalavya)	100%
V. Kaushik's Probity	3.3	3.1	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Almost no hints of immoral elements. Harming due to adherence to dubious principles mentioned. <i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Nature of lie indicating the utilitarian aspect of truth.</p>	Trade off (preserving truth at any cost)	Care/harm Fairness/cheating (in the reverse manner, excessive adherence to truth)	31.6 %

(Table 5 Continued)

(Table 5 Continued)

Stories	Mean Ratings of Immoral Elements	Mean Ratings of Moral Conflicts	Emergent Themes	Relevant Variables	Possible Moral Foundations	Familiarity
VI. The Duel	8.2	8.0	<p>Immoral Elements: Violation of war ethics along with harm.</p> <p>Moral Conflicts: Ethics of transgressions and killing in the context of war. Priorities versus humanity saving lives versus rules.</p>	<p>Directness of harm, kinship and collectivism and intentionality, perhaps trade-off (harming another to save one)</p>	<p>Care/harm (saving Satyaki, by incapacitating Vurisraba)</p> <p>Fairness/cheating (unlawful mutilation in spite of engaging and winning in 'ethical' fighting)</p> <p>Loyalty /betrayal (being loyal to ingroup member).</p> <p>Authority/subversion (obedience of order)</p>	36.67%
VII. The Thirty-two Marks	8.8	3.7	<p>Immoral Elements: Violation of duty and the principle of reciprocity.</p> <p>Moral Conflicts: Ethics of transgression and killing within the context of war. Between roles (father vs. warrior).</p>	<p>Directness of harm, intentionality and kinship (perhaps species: human sacrifice more immoral than animals)</p>	<p>Fairness/cheating (Arjuna not dutiful father yet asking for sacrifice)</p> <p>Authority (obedience of father's orders, obedience of Krishna)</p> <p>Loyalty/betrayal (prioritising group needs)</p>	6.67%

VIII. The Attack on Pandava Base	8.2	4.9	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of war ethics along with harm (nocturnal fighting). <i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Ethics of transgression and killing within the context of the war.</p>	<p>Directness of harm, intentionality</p>	<p>Care/harm Fairness/ cheating Loyalty/betrayal (prioritising group needs).</p>	75.0%
IX. The Death of Dronacharya	10.3	3.2	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of truth along with harm. <i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Ethics of transgression and killing within the context of the war.</p>	<p>Directness of harm, intentionality and kinship (group goals)</p>	<p>Fairness/ Cheating (twisting of facts to make it convincing),</p>	95.0%
X. The Chakra-vyuha	5.3	2.5	<p><i>Immoral Elements:</i> Violation of war ethics along with harm. <i>Moral Conflicts:</i> Ethics of transgression and killing within the context of the war.</p>	<p>Directness of harm, intentionality and kinship (order by a father figure to embark on a journey)</p>	<p>Loyalty/betrayal (prioritising group needs).</p>	95%

Source: The author.

Each story is thus unique in its own right. It is beyond the scope of the present work to comment on the most competent ones. It is perhaps more utilitarian to treat these as a pool of vignettes, subsuming different areas of immorality and varying degrees of conflict. The final choices of stories to serve as vignettes may be determined by the relevant variables under study, the contexts (violation in the civil context vs. issues of sanctioned aggression in war), the nature of transgressions involved, violation of roles and so on.

References to antecedent events were often encountered, indicating a spontaneous judgement about familiar events. Also, comments on specific role requirements were discussed (role and duties of a teacher, father, student, friend, etc.) which may reflect cultural stereotypes and thus, to some extent, the involvement of automated, intuitive judgement. However, participants who judged the stories can clearly explain and give reasons for their ratings. Therefore, in the present case, the moral judgement might not be completely intuitional as held by Haidt (2001). As argued by Narvaez (2010) intuition and reason are like 'partners in dance' (p.171) in which one leads to the other. The present pool might have triggered such amalgamated processes as it involves both reasoning and traditional stereotypes and judgements, long held in the Indian psyche.

Certain limitations may be observed. A range of ratings varied from 1 to 11, with clusters around a few points, demanding probe on the stability of ratings. Often similar explanations held for both high and low ratings, reflecting a difference in the degree of quantification but not qualification. In spite of compact construction, reference to antecedent events cannot be ruled out. More research needs to be conducted before the findings can be embedded in a theoretical premise.

Conclusion

The present stories are distinct, the events being more certain than familiar Western dilemmas such as a trolley, crying baby and so on. The pool involves characters that have been traditionally dubbed as 'good' or 'bad' and 'moral' or 'immoral'. Parallel contemporary stories developed in the modern context might encourage the retention of the essence of these transgressions, helping in exploring if morality is associated with stereotypes held long in our psyche. The present

research may serve as a starting point for further probe on the validity of the pool in understanding the moral spectrum, subsuming scope for greater ecological validity.

Appendix

The Text of Ten Final Stories (Translated from Bengali)

The Beetle Bite

Parashurama, the warrior-sage, used to impart knowledge on the arts of warfare and archery only to Brahmins. Karna, disguised as a Brahmin, beseeched Parashurama to take him as his disciple. One fine day Karna offered his lap to his *Guru* for a quick nap. Parashurama fell fast asleep with his head resting on Karna's lap. A poisonous beetle crawled up the leg of Karna and stung Karna's thigh. Karna endured the severe pain with tenacity, dreading that even the slightest dislodging of his lap would disrupt the *Guru's* slumber. When Parashurama woke and saw the blood oozing out of Karna's thigh, he was infuriated as a doubt confronted him regarding Karna's identity. He deduced that Karna was not a Brahmin since a Brahmin wouldn't have borne such pain in silence. When Karna disclosed the truth to warrior-sage he felt deceived and cursed Karna for cheating him. He stated that Karna would be unable to recall the incantation for procuring the weapon during his greatest need.

A Friend in Need

A king named Britra ruled over his kingdom, conforming to the rules and laws of the land. In order to secure victory and become the master of the universe, he started rigorous penance. Indra (The king of heaven) was petrified at this and apprehended that Britra would gain control over everything, including heaven. Indra summoned Vishnu in fear of being driven out of 'Devaloka' (heaven)—the abode of the devas. Vishnu replied, 'Britra being a close friend of mine, it is not possible for me to terminate him. I shall bestow upon you a portion of my divine energy so that you might kill him'. Indra wielded the energy of Lord Vishnu in the form of lightening and hurled it towards Britra's head, killing him.

The Chariot Wheel

While fighting with Arjuna on the battlefield, Karna's chariot wheel was stuck in the ground. In order to release it, he lowered his weapons and got down from the chariot. It was dishonourable and against the rule of war to kill or attack an unarmed person on the battlefield. But Arjuna, on the advice of Krishna, took advantage of this situation, struck him with an arrow and killed the unarmed Karna.

The Service Fee

Dronacharya was the royal 'Guru' (teacher) of the Pandavas. He had solemnly avowed Arjuna to make him the best archer on Earth. Ekalavya, a young lad, once managed to gain audience with Dronacharya. Learning that Ekalavya was of lower caste, Dronacharya turned him away. Anguished by Dronacharya's rejection, Ekalavya fashioned a clay image of Dronacharya and commenced a disciplined programme of self-study. One day, when Dronacharya went out hunting with his students, he was flabbergasted at the prodigious archery skill of Ekalavya. They were unable to fathom how such a feat could be accomplished. Ekalavya announced himself as a mentee of Dronacharya. Arjuna reminded Dronacharya of the promise made to him. Dronacharya supplicated Ekalavya to offer his right thumb as 'Dakshina' (service fees). Ekalavya unhesitatingly cut off and placed it at Dronacharya's feet, despite knowing that this would irreparably hamper his archery skill.

Kaushik's Probity

A Brahmin sage named Kaushik was known for his unflinching adherence to *satyam* (honesty). A group of people once sought refuge in the sage's hermitage in order to flee from a band of plunderers. Upon inquiry by the plunderers, the sage, oblivious to the fact that they would kill, revealed the place of concealment of the people. The helpless folks had to meet with their tragic end. Sage Kaushik was condemned to hell for accountability of the death caused to innocent people.

The Duel

In the battle of Kurukshetra, Vurishraba sided with the *Kauravas*, while Satyaki allied with the *Pandava* army. Satyaki fought an intense battle

with valour, against his arch-rival Vurisraba. After a prolonged combat, Satyaki was battered and dragged across the battlefield by Vurisraba. Arjuna was alerted of Satyaki's precarious condition by Lord Krishna. Just as Vurisraba was preparing to behead Satyaki, Arjuna came to his rescue on advice of Krishna. A sharp arrow came whizzing from Arjuna's bow and pierced Vurisraba's arm. Arjuna had violated the honour of war, by striking as a third party in the duel between Satyaki and Vurisraba, without a formal challenge.

The Thirty-two Marks

A specific outcome of the battle of Kurukshetra could not be foreseen and thus Krishna sermonised the *Devatas* (gods) and placed his decision of human sacrifice. Only a warrior possessing 32 distinctive sacred marks on his body was eligible for the sacrifice. Krishna, Arjuna and Iravana were the holder of such traits. Iravana was the son of Arjuna and his consort, Ulupi. Iravana had expressed his desire of fighting for the *Pandavas* in the battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna accepted him as an ally, although he had no knowledge of such a son. Arjuna requested him to embrace death, for the sake of the victory of the *Pandavas*. Iravana gave his consent and sacrificed his life on behalf of the *Pandavas*.

The Attack on Pandava Base

On the last night of the battle of Kurukshetra, Duryodhana lay vanquished. The triumph of the *Pandavas* was imminent. Ashwatthama, Kritavarma and Kripacharya were taking repose in the woods. Suddenly Ashwatthama observed an owl ambushing a murder of crows. Seeing this, he envisioned the idea of attacking the *Pandava* camp at night, since he was well aware that it was unfeasible to subjugate the mighty *Pandavas* in a face-to-face combat. Ashwatthama placed his decision before Kritavarma and Kripacharya. On hearing this, they were conscience stricken. But Ashwatthama ruthlessly hacked down his enemies in the *Pandava* cantonment, except the five Pandava brothers, Krishna and Satyaki. Duryodhana responded ecstatically to this news.

The Death of Dronacharya

Dronacharya was the teacher of the art of war for both the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*. At the time of the battle of Kurukshetra, Dronacharya, the

old veteran fighter, was fighting in favor of the Kauravas. When Dronacharya became invincible in war, he was told that his only son Ashwatthama had been killed. Dronacharya did not believe it and asked the eldest *Pandava*, Yudhisthira, who was reputed for never telling a lie, if his son was really dead. Yudhisthir shouted back, 'Ashwatthama is dead', and then murmured inaudibly 'the elephant'. Indeed, an elephant named Ashwatthama had been killed. Convinced of the tragedy, Dronacharya lost his desire to live and renounced all weapons. Dhrishtdyumna, who had an earlier enmity with Dronacharya, came forward and beheaded the defenceless old teacher and threw it towards the *Kauravas*.

The Chakravyuha

Abhimanyu was the 16-year-old son of Arjuna, the third *Pandava*. His battle skills were extraordinary, and he could break into any arrangement of the army, except the *Chakravyuha* (the circular arrangement). He had learnt how to penetrate a *Chakravyuha* but did not know how to escape. One day, during the great battle of Kurukshetra, the Kauravas arranged their army in a *Chakravyuha* pattern and thus became virtually unbeatable. Yudhisthira, the eldest *Pandava* ordered his nephew Abhimanyu, in the absence of his father, to enter the circle and promised that the rest of the *Pandava* army will follow. Abhimanyu went in, but Yudhisthira and his force could not access the arrangement. Inside the *Chakravyuha*, Abhimanyu fought alone with valour. Finally, seven famous experienced army generals (*Maharathis*) of the *Kauravas* surrounded the boy and killed him.

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