
An Intertextual Scrutiny On Gurcharan Das's *The Difficulty Of Being Good: On The Subtle Art Of Dharma*

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Paper Received on 28-01-2023, Accepted on 15-03-2023, Published on 16-03-23; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.279

Abstract:

Every writer attempts to implement one's work on another work to show their distinctive thoughts and ideas from simple to complex and vice versa. Many books, novels, fiction, and non-fiction are based on the old great epic *MB* from a different perspective. Even though it is interpreted and reinterpreted, written and rewritten, told and retold umpteen times, but still, even more, it can be interpreted in many aspects. For instance, the protagonist "Karna" from *MB* and "Jesus Christ" from *the Bible* can be compared. To exemplify specific characterization through some renowned works is *The Palace of Illusions*, written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, described from the viewpoint of Draupadi. *Ajaya*, written by Anand Neelkantan, is a beautifully written novel from Duryodhana's perspective. *Yajnaseni*, written by Pratibha Ray, is an attempt to understand the psyche of Draupadi, and *The Difficult of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*, written by Gurcharan Das, depicts the epic characters and their strenuous moral choices which

lead to ethical conflicts and dilemma in certain circumstances.

Key Words: Intertextuality, Dharma, Mahabharata, Moral Conflicts, Dilemma.

Gurcharan Das is a prolific writer, columnist, speaker, commentator, and public intellectual. Das was born on 3 Oct 1943 in Lyallpur, India. He was a columnist for five Indian newspapers, including the Times of India, and contributed to the Financial Times as a businessman, The New York Times, and other Foreign journals. Later, he took his early retirement and became a prominent writer. He has penned a novel, plays, an anthology, and non-fiction works. Some of his works are *A Fine Family*, a story that follows a multigenerational Punjabi family saga, and plays *Larins Sahib*, *Mira*, and *9Jackhoo Hill*. His non-fictional works include *The Elephant Paradigm: India Wrestles with Change*, *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information age*, and *The*

Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma was published in 2009.

The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma combines anecdotes from actual life incidents based on the great epic 'The Mahabharata'. Das attempts to retell the epic *The Mahabharata* as an introductory text in their original text with splendid simplicity rather than being controversial. When Gurcharan Das changed his typical writing style from Economics to Ethics, he planned to read one of the greatest epics and explore it through contemporary life. It extracts the epic characters and their strenuous moral choices, which lead to ethical conflicts and dilemmas in certain circumstances. Thus, he provokes a connection between contemporary issues, moral dilemmas, and inner conflicts through individual characters from the great epic.

The Difficulty of Being Good is a modern text which revisits the Mahabharata and spotlights contemporary life to have a clear path to illuminate and look for tangible solutions to current problems. Thus, Das admits that his attempt is "to learn about the past with full consciousness of the present— and also to learn something about the present in encountering the past" (*TDBG*xxix). Das's *The Difficulty of Being Good* emulates and merges with characters' inner conflicts in reality to interpret the psychological aspects of life. The epic characters are flawed; they stumble. But their incoherent experiences illuminate our daily emotions of envy, revenge, remorse, status anxiety,

compassion, courage, duty, and other moral qualities. In simple, the Mahabharata story unfolds in each chapter; the focus moves to a single character and their ethical problem and its significance for our lives.

The chaotic theme in *The Difficulty of Being Good* dwells on how difficult it is to be good and to live in this complex world without being destructive. In other words, 'the quest for dharma in a dharma world', and the ridiculous thing is that 'good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people'. Das contextualizes the present Indian situation with the two-thousand-year-old myth and the legendary characters. In analyzing the Indian scenario, Das exposes the failure of dharma in our own country in professional, public, and social life. Das admits that:

Moral failure permeated our public life and hung over it like Delhi smog. One out of five members of the Indian parliament elected in 2004 had criminal charges against him. A survey by a Harvard professor found that one out of every four teachers in government primary schools is absent, and one out of four needs to be teaching. A World Bank study found that two out of five doctors do not attend state primary health centers and that 69 percent of their medicines are stolen. A cycle rickshaw driver in Kanpur routinely pays a fifth of his daily earning in bribes to the police. A farmer can only hope to get a clear title to his land by bribing a revenue official, and that too

after a humiliating ordeal of countless visits to the revenue office. (*TDBG* xxxiii)

The Difficulty of Being Good is influenced by the most incredible epic, MB, where the primary text is similar. Still, the interpretation and the interweaving of readers are in sharp contrast. Wherein Mahabharata is highly complex to express one's peculiar vision towards the other and filled with notable characters. The most influential personalities are Draupadi and the five Pandavas, and Krishna as a charioteer on the side of dharma and truthfulness. On the other hand, dharma and wicked people are Duryodhana, Bhishma, Karna, Ashwatthama, and Shakuni. The prototypical author Das vividly narrates contemporary society through epic characters.

Bhishma's inner conflict is portrayed abruptly and interrelated to contemporary society. Das gives an example of two karma yogis, M.K.Gandhi, and Dhirubhai Ambani. Karna, in *The Difficulty of Being Good*, is the most exciting figure in the epic, and he constantly struggles between society and status anxiety. The class discrimination between the Kshatriyas and the charioteer is abruptly shown in the 21st century, i.e., the difference between high-class and low-class people. Das reflects that ambition, selfishness, and envy of Duryodhana lead him and his family to destruction.

Das emphasizes Yudhishtira's duty and remorse, Arjuna's despair, and

Draupadi's courage. Yudhishtira's task is to save his kingdom and the people. He is remorseful for his false duty contrary to his brothers' sacrifice in the Kurukshetra war. Draupadi's courage is overwhelming that women must raise questions about women being misled in society and being dominated by men. Das asks, "If god is good, why is his world so bad?" (*TDBG* 208). Thus, Krishna's guile focuses on good versus evil, where good is Lord Krishna and evil is Kauravas, and it is not a typical fight or a battle between God and humans, but the holy spirit against an evil spirit.

Das amalgamates the great epic of the Mahabharata with contemporary society and analyses the inner conflicts and the moral dilemma of human beings as a replica of the chaotic condition in the Mahabharata. Though dharma takes the throne in the beginning, in the end, dharma ends the rule of dharma in the world. *The Difficulty of Being Good* ends with the tone of a positive attitude toward the real world.

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How to cite this article?

**K.V.V.Poornima Lakshmi & Dr.M.Kannadhasan,“ An Intertextual Scrutiny
On Gurcharan Das’s The Difficulty Of Being Good: On The Subtle Art Of
Dharma” Research Journal Of English(RJOE)8(1),PP:280-283,2023,
DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.283**