

Duty and Honour

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Abstract: *This research paper delves into the profound themes of duty and honour as depicted in two monumental epics: The Bhagavad Gita and The Iliad. Through the narratives of Arjuna and Achilles, the paper elucidates the timeless struggles that define human existence. Arjuna's turmoil on the battlefield of Kurukshetra exemplifies the clash between personal affection and moral obligation, where his hesitation to confront loved ones reveals the emotional weight of duty. Guided by Krishna, Arjuna learns that true strength lies in steadfastness to justice, despite the heart's trepidation. Conversely, Achilles embodies the fierce fire of pride and grief, grappling with the insult to his honour and the devastating loss of his beloved friend, Patroclus. His journey transforms grief into a deeper understanding of honour, one rooted in love and loyalty rather than mere ego. The analysis highlights that while Arjuna approaches his duty with calm introspection, Achilles' path is marked by tempestuous emotion, yet both warriors ultimately exemplify the essence of courage. The paper posits that the true battlefield extends beyond physical confrontations, residing instead within the human heart where doubt and conviction intertwine. It asserts that the noblest victories are those of inner resilience, manifested in choices that reflect integrity and purpose, even amid personal sacrifice. Furthermore, the research draws parallels between these ancient tales and contemporary life, illustrating that the essence of duty and honour remains relevant in today's moral dilemmas. It emphasizes that every individual faces daily battles that require balancing personal desires with ethical responsibilities. The narratives serve as poignant reminders that courage is not the absence of fear but the conscious choice to act with heart and conviction, even when faced with uncertainty. Ultimately, this exploration reveals that duty and honour are universal values that transcend time and culture. They guide us in navigating the complexities of human relationships and moral choices, urging us to embrace love, truth, and a commitment to something greater than ourselves. Through the legacies of Arjuna and Achilles, we learn that honour is not merely a grand concept but a lived experience, shaped by the choices we make in the quiet moments of life*

Keywords: Timeless values, Cultural relevance, Strength of character

I. INTRODUCTION

Some words carry a quiet but powerful weight. *Duty* and *honour* are two such words. They are not just ideas from the past they shape how people live, act, and remember themselves. These values have guided human lives for centuries, across different cultures and lands. They ask us to stand firm in our choices, even when the heart is uncertain. Two great epics, *The Bhagavad Gita* from India and *The Iliad* from Greece, explore these timeless values in powerful and emotional ways. In *The Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna stands torn between love and responsibility. In *The Iliad*, Achilles burns with pride, grief, and honour. Though their worlds are different, their struggles echo the same human truths. These stories remind us that duty and honour are not only about grand wars they are about the silent, personal battles we all face.

II. THE WEIGHT OF DUTY

On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna prepares to lead his army. His bow is strong, his skills unmatched, but his heart trembles. Across the field stand his cousins, friends, and teachers people he loves deeply. The thought of fighting them fills him with unbearable pain. In that moment, duty and emotion collide inside him. He questions the point of the war, the value of victory, and the cost of doing what seems "right". That is when Krishna, his guide and charioteer, speaks with a calm but firm voice. He tells Arjuna that duty is not always easy or fair. It often demands sacrifice and pain. But



abandoning it would bring deeper sorrow. Krishna reminds him that he cannot control the outcome, only his actions. His duty is to stand for justice not for personal gain, but because it is the right thing to do..

My body quivers and hair stands on end.

The bow Gandiva slips from my hand and my skin burns all over.

I am unable to stand; my mind whirls as it

were; and Kesavan, I see adverse omens. (*The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 1.29,30)

In *The Iliad*, Achilles stands as a symbol of strength and pride. He is the greatest warrior of his time brave, bold, and unshaken. But when Agamemnon, the Greek leader, insults and dishonours him, Achilles' pride flares. He steps away from the war, refusing to fight. For him, honour is everything. Without it, even victory tastes bitter. The turning point comes when his closest friend, Patroclus, dies in battle. Achilles' pain is raw and fierce. The fire of his pride turns into the fire of love and loss.

In this grief, Achilles rediscovers the meaning of honour. It is no longer about ego or personal glory it is about love, loyalty, and standing up for someone who mattered to him. He knows that returning to the war will cost him his life, but he chooses it anyway. To him, dying with honour is far more meaningful than living without it. His story burns with emotion, showing how pain can give new shape to a person's purpose. What truly binds Arjuna and Achilles is not the battles they fight with weapons, but the battles they fight within themselves.

Achilles' struggle, by contrast, is fierce and raw. His pride is wounded by insult, and when his beloved friend Patroclus is killed, his grief flares into a consuming fire. Achilles' path is not one of calm reflection; it is a storm of emotion, of love and rage and the urgent need to reclaim honour. Yet beneath the fire of his anger, there is a truth that resonates with Arjuna's struggle: courage is not the absence of fear or pain. Courage is moving forward, despite it. It is making choices that break your heart yet define your character. Both stories remind us that duty and honour are not simple commands; they are lived experiences, forged through self-awareness, intention, and emotional courage.

In the end, both Arjuna and Achilles teach us a universal truth: the noblest victories are not always celebrated with cheers. They are quiet, inner triumphs, moments when the heart chooses courage over comfort, truth over convenience, and duty over desire. Arjuna shows us the strength of calm reflection and faith. Achilles shows us the power of fiery passion and loyalty. Together, they remind us that courage and honour wear many faces, but they are always born in the heart.

III. TWO PATHS, ONE TRUTH

Though Arjuna and Achilles are from different lands, their hearts speak the same language. Arjuna chooses quiet responsibility, guided by faith. Achilles chooses fiery passion, guided by love and pain. One stands calm in duty; the other burns with emotion. But both stand firm when it matters most. Both their journeys are rooted in love. Arjuna hesitates because he loves those he must face in battle. Achilles fights because he loves the friend he has lost. Their love does not make them weak it makes their choices harder and their courage more real. Fate, too, plays a strong role in their stories. Arjuna learns to trust the larger plan of life. Achilles accepts his fate and walks toward it with open eyes. Both remind us that while we cannot control everything around us, we can choose how we respond to life.

Even though these stories are centuries old, they feel strikingly fresh today. We may not wear armour or ride into war, but we face our own daily battles. We struggle between personal desires and responsibilities, between comfort and doing what is right. Duty and honour still live in those quiet, personal choices when a teacher stands up for a student, when a parent sacrifices for their child, or when a person refuses to turn away from injustice. Arjuna shows us the strength of faith and responsibility. Achilles shows us the fire of passion and loyalty. One finds clarity through wisdom, the other through emotion. Together, they remind us that courage wears many faces. It does not always roar; sometimes, it simply stands quietly and does not give up.

Forth to the pile was borne the man divine,

And placed aloft; while all, with streaming eyes,

Beheld the flames and rolling smokes arise.

The snowy bones his friends and brothers place

In a golden vase; the golden vase in purple palls they roll'd." (*The Iliad*, Book XXIV. 745)



What both warriors show us is that real strength is born in the quiet, heavy moments of life. The battlefield is not only a place of arrows and swords; it is also a space within the human heart where doubt, grief, and conviction clash. Victory alone does not measure heroism. It is the weight of the choices we carry, the moments when we act despite trembling hearts, that truly shapes a person.

Sacrifice is inseparable from their paths. Arjuna must fight against those he loves to uphold justice. Achilles must confront his own mortality, knowing that to live without honour would render life empty. These sacrifices are not abstract ideas; they reflect the real struggles of human life. Each of us, in some way, faces choices that test our hearts, demand courage, and ask us to put what is right above what is easy. Pain, hesitation, and loss are all part of growing into integrity, honour, and purpose

IV. SUMMATION

When we look closely at these two heroes, a clear truth shines through: duty and honour are universal. They are not bound by time, language, or land. In *The Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna teaches that true strength is found in staying true to your responsibilities, even when your heart breaks. In *The Iliad*, Achilles shows that honour can be found in love, loyalty, and standing firm even when fate is cruel. Both stories teach us that duty and honour are not just about war or grand victories. They live in the personal, human choices we make every day. They are about doing what is right, even when it is hard. They are about love — love for people, for truth, and for something greater than ourselves. In a world where many things change quickly, these values remain steady. They give direction when everything else feels uncertain. They remind us that courage doesn't always mean being fearless it means showing up with heart, with faith, and with honour.

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