**The Terrible Avalanche of *Daiva*: Divine Intervention and Human Initiative in *Mahabharata***

In this paper I will try to explore the often-cited debate of the *Mahabharata* regarding the powers that are thought to determine the course of human action, starting from the desire behind the act, to the act itself and its results. My area of discussion is the conflict between divine intervention and human initiative in *Mahabharata*. Hence, the issue covers the themes like the *purusakra* (literally “that which is done by a human being” and *Daiva* (that which comes “from the gods”. I seek to determine the respective roles of these powers, their relationship to the process of *karma*, and their implications with respect to the epic’s notions of self-determination and human freedom.

**The Cosmic Setting:**

A first, and rather general, answer to this question is suggested when we look beyond the mundane events of the narrative to the cosmic setting in which the human drama takes place. For the earth is not the only battleground and human beings are not the only actors in the drama. The fate of the three worlds (*trailokya*) is at stake? and beyond this we glimpse the inexorable course of a cosmos governed by ths yogic rhythm of the Supreme Divinity (*purusottama*). To understand the role of *daiva* in the epic, we must examine the law of the course of time (*paryadharma kalyasya*) experienced by Dhritarastra in relation to the creative Life of the Divinity, and to the life of the *trailokya*, specifically to the decline of the socio-cosmic moral order or dharma (which becomes a function of time rather than of human conduct). Insofar as it is linked to the Divinity and to the seven worlds of epic cosmology, macrocosmic Daiva (distinguished with a capital D) is time (*kala*), an inexorable cyclic process of creation, manifestation and destruction of the cosmos.

**The Indomitable Force of the Human Will:**

In this paper I will try to shed light on the epic’s vision of the human journey towards the special type of freedom known as *moksa*. This involves a quantum shift in self-identity in which the human ego (*ahamkara*), together with its sense of agency (*kartrtva*), is "sacrificed" (or transcended) in favour of a larger system of identity, described in the *Bhagavadgita* as “the self of the self all beings” (*sarvabhutamahabhutatma*). *Puruskara* based on ideas of "I" (aham) and "mine" (*mama*) is thus fated to dissolve with the dissolution of the ego, to be replaced by devotion to the higher purposes of the Cosmos. These higher purposes are known as *Daiva*, and they are represented in the epic by Krishsna, the incarnation of God (avatara) who has descended to Earth to restore the moral order (*dharma*). From this perspective *Daiva* is the driving force behind the great macrocosmic cycles of world creation and destruction. However, it is also active in the microcosmic world of character and behaviour, experienced in human, life as the various obstacles to the fulfilment of desire (kama). In terms of the karma theory, *daiva* (with a small d) is the inexorable "fate" resulting from the desire-prompted initiatives of the past. In effect, these notions of *Daiva* and *purushakara* are tied to two perspectives of human nature, the perspective of the *karmastha,* those who take their stand in action," and the perspective of the *sattvastha*, “those who take their stand in the truth”, i.e. the troth that ultimately, the ego - and its sense of agency is a mental fiction-a case of mistaken identity.

*The Mahabhharata* is an ideal sourcebook from which to study human agency and conduct in the Indian context. Here, in fact is an entire gamut of ideas on the subject from those reminiscent of the early *Vedas* to the role of divine grace and the mature doctrines of karma. The earlier notions are echoed in the various attempts to seek favours of the gods - the need for Arjuna to secure divine weapons by propitiating Indra and Siva or the efforts of Amb2 to secure a boon from &a to kill Bhisma (V.188.7-13). More common is the brahmanic (i.e. orthodox) perspective of the many passages comparing the brahmins to the gods (e.g. 111.197.20; XII.329.13; XIII.129.2: etc.). Several passages even describe them as “the gods of the very gods" - *devanamapi devata* (e.g. XII.60.41; XIII.35.21; XIII.136.16-20). Furthermore, we are told that there is a constant rivalry - *sada vigraha* - between the gods and the forest sages or *rishi* (XIII.6.25). The gods are also occasionally assimilated to the powers of the senses, which, of course, the *yogi* must control (e.g. XII.316.16).

On the one hand, human life and the course of history are seen by many epic characters as governed exclusively by *daiva* (and the other external forces noted by Hopkins), or by *swavhaba*, a term that suggests something inherent in the nature of a thing that makes it act as it does. Human effort or *purusakara* is inconsequential, ephemeral, or even futile in the face of the overwhelming tide of events, whether these are the result of socio-political conditions or natural forces, beyond the power of the individual to change. Such a position is exemplified by the blind king Dhitarastra, so much so that Dumezil, for example, takes him to be “the very image, if not the incarnation of Destiny, Bhagya. All the king can do is to see in his thoughts the destruction of the Kurus (V.50.58).

And yet, paradoxically, the epic also carries a commanding message that the lives of both individuals and societies may be changed for the better through human initiative (*purusakara*) in accordance with the dharma, the moral order sanctioned by religious tradition. This is, indeed, the teaching that Krishna is at pains to convey to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita*. Krishna himself always acts for the welfare of the worlds (*lokasamgraha*) and he urges Arjuna to do the same. Action not only can but must be taken in fulfilment of one's dharma. Arjuna must get up and fight (*uttistha bharata*)! And he is finally urged to make up his own mind about what he should do.

**Conclusion:**

Such sanction by the Lord himself suggests that this more positive outlook is not the exuberance of youth or the ignorance of the blind but is justified by the very conditions of existence. However, there is little consensus on the degree to which humans can change or stem the tide of events that appear as if governed by a greater divine force with a will of its own. Moreover - and this will also claim our attention - there is still some question as to whether the work of the human agent flows from a truly personal decision in the first place. This creates a constant tension between the two opposed poles.