

Notice for the PhD Viva Voce Examination

Mr Sunny Kumar, Registration Number: 1930094, PhD Scholar at the Department of English and Cultural Studies, School of Humanities and Performing Arts, CHRIST (Deemed to be University) will defend his PhD thesis at the public viva-voce examination on Friday, 22 May 2026 at 10.00 am in Room No. 05, Ground Floor, R&D Block, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru - 560029, Karnataka, India.

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| Title of the Thesis | : | Ethical Relativism in the <i>Mahabharata</i> and <i>The Iliad</i> |
| Discipline | : | English Studies |
| External Examiner - I | : | Dr Sambit Panigrahi Professor Department of English Ravenshaw University Cuttack- 753003 Odisha |
| External Examiner - II | : | Dr D R Shashidhara Professor Department of English Mangalore University Mangalagangotri – 574199 Karnataka |
| Supervisor | : | Dr Bidyut Bhusan Jena Assistant Professor Department of English and Cultural Studies School of Humanities and Performing Arts CHRIST (Deemed to be University) Bengaluru - 560029 Karnataka |

The members of the Research Advisory Committee of the Scholar, the faculty members of the Department and the School, interested experts and research scholars of all the branches of research are cordially invited to attend this open viva-voce examination.

Place: Bengaluru
Date: 19 May 2026



Registrar (Academics)

ABSTRACT

An epic can be defined as an ancient tale that has travelled through time and that which encompasses actions of rather extraordinary characters that turned into legends because of the grandeur and unfathomable events associated with them. These long narrative poems generally involving a time beyond the living memory which encompasses the extraordinary deeds of extraordinary men and women dealing with gods or other superhuman forces, giving shape to the mortal universe for their descendants, the poet, and his audience, and also to understand themselves as a people or nation. One of the most profound aspects of epics lies in their engagement with cultural norms and values. They serve as both mirrors and molders of the societies that produced them, often reflecting ethical frameworks and questioning prevailing moral standards. For example, the loyalty of Homer's Odysseus, the dharma-bound choices of Vyasa's Yudhishtira in the *Mahabharata*, or the piety and leadership of Virgil's Aeneas are all steeped in ethical considerations. These characters are celebrated not merely for their actions but for the values their actions endorse or challenge. Epics often use the interplay of simultaneous events to emphasise the consequences of ethical decisions.

This study has conducted a thorough examination of ancient epics to illuminate the cultural nuances of ethics, the roles of central characters, and the determinants of their ethical decisions, especially within the realm of warfare. The study delved into the intricacies of ethical decision-making in the *Mahabharata* and *The Iliad*, utilising philosophical frameworks from Indian and Western traditions. The study explored ethical relativism within the narratives of timeless epics using insights from Bimal Krishna Matilal and Immanuel Kant's foundational work. In addition, an examination of free will and determinism through the lens of Vedanta and Robert Kane's libertarianism, in conjunction with the Ajivika school of Indian philosophy and David Hume's influential writings, offered a comprehensive insight into the characters' agency and the philosophical foundations influencing their behaviours. The *Mahabharata* and *The Iliad* provide deep insights into the ethical challenges individuals encounter during times of war and conflict.

This study emphasises the importance of ancient texts in current discussions, showcasing the lasting relevance of ethical and moral aspects portrayed in them. This thesis enhances comprehension of the ethical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of the *Mahabharata* and *The Iliad*. It provides valuable insights into human morality by examining ancient texts through ethical relativism, free will, and determinism, highlighting the enduring relevance of these timeless epics.

Keywords: *Ethical Relativism, Free Will, Determinism, Libertarianism, Just War Theory, Epics*

Publications:

1. **Kumar, Sunny.** "Understanding the Riddle of Existence through Yaksha Prashna in the Mahabharata." *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 16, Issue 2, November 2025. Indexed in Clarivate – ESCI Web of Science. ISSN: 2069-1025, e-ISSN: 2248-3446.
2. **Kumar, Sunny.** *Review of Tara's Truce by Kavita Kane. Literary Voice*, forthcoming March 2026. Indexed in Clarivate – ESCI Web of Science. ISSN: 2277-4521.