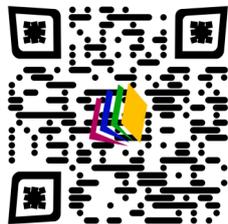


e-ISSN: 2582-502X

Asiatic Society for Social Science  
Research. 2(1): June 2020, 99-104.

### Research Article



www.asssr.in  
(Peer Reviewed)

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Received on 21.05.2020

Modified on 03.06.2020

Accepted on 26.06.2020

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## **Ideas related to war in Ancient India: Mahābhārata, Aśoka and Hero-Stones**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Over the years, perspectives towards the idea of war have resulted in a fierce debate that ensues till date. On one side are the pacifists who believe that war and violence are unjustifiable. On the other side are the hawkish militarists who feel that engaging in violence for one's cause requires no justification. It is rather interesting to note that this debate between violence and non-violence can be traced in ancient Indian history too. This paper attempts to explore two perspectives of war which are polar opposites of each other. The two differing viewpoints have been explored through the lens of the Mahabharata and Ashokan inscriptions. Moreover, this essay will also briefly highlight how the study of perspectives towards war in ancient India can be made more nuanced and rich by carefully studying the tradition of hero-stones along with the texts and inscriptions.

**KEY WORDS:** Mahābhārata, Aśoka, Megalithic, Hero Stones, Ancient India

While studying the history of ancient India hardly anyone can miss the predominance of wars and battles. Since the starting of historical period there are references of wars, for instance the 'gaveśnā' or 'gaveṣṭhi' of early Vedic period. Even in the later Vedic period there are evidences of rituals and sacrifices, such as the Aśvamedha yajña or rājasuya yajña, which were done with the motive of acquiring more and more territory, obviously through the means of warfare. Moreover, it seems through the study of different texts and other sources, especially through panegyrics or praśastis that most of the ancient Indian kings boast about their victories in battles and often a list of their enemies whom they had defeated in battle was provided by their court poets. It seems, being a great warrior was considered as an important attribute of a king and a quality worth boasting. However, in the ancient period, amid all this warfare and bloodshed, there was one king who did not take pride in fighting battles and massacring people, there was one ambassador of peace, the Mauryan king Aśoka. Historians still wonder about this king, whether he was a pacifist or a pragmatic? This essay is an attempt to understand how different 'ideas'