

25th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

The Bhagavad Gītā

WINTHROP SARGEANT

Foreword by Huston Smith

Editor's Preface by Christopher Key Chapple



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THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

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THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

Twenty-fifth-Anniversary Edition

Translated by
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Edited and with a Preface by
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Foreword by
HUSTON SMITH



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To my dear wife, Jane

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FOREWORD

Huston Smith

I have written over thirty-five forewords to books, but none with the urgency with which I write this one.

Why is that the case? Because this edition of the Gītā looks so daunting that general readers are likely to conclude that it is not the one for them. But that would be a serious mistake, for the truth is that this is a multivalent book—there is something in it that will reward every serious reader.

Christopher Chapple's admirable preface summarizes the Bhagavad Gītā's plot and positions it in the vast literature of the Vedas. For Sanskrit scholars no stone is left unturned: abbreviations for grammatical usages—active, ablative, accusative, adjective, and adverb—are entered, and both English and Sanskrit grammar is remarked. It would be tedious to argue further the comprehensiveness of the book's grammatical workout, but scholars can be assured that the coverage is exhaustive. A list of abbreviations that are used in the volume is included, as well as epithets (nicknames) that appear in the Gītā. When we turn to the text proper, for every line the Sanskrit is printed, followed by the transliteration of that line, and finally, the line's English translation. For those who only want to read the Gītā's story, therefore, the book is literally a page-turner, for all they need do is to read the verses on the bottom left-hand side of each page. However, should readers want elaboration, they will find it in the right-hand column of the page where, for example, *dharma* is translated as duty, law, righteousness, virtue, and honor.

So it goes. I am unspeakably grateful to Christopher Chapple for attending to the foregoing material for it frees me to attend to the substance of this classic. What does the Gītā use the foregoing machinery and underpinnings to *say*? Eager as I am to get to that substance, there is one transitional point that I want to make.

There are some books that will never have definitive editions, and I am not confining myself to translations; I am thinking of the vernacular in which the substance of the texts are cast—idioms, metaphors, analogies, innuendos and their likes. The reason for this is that in a way, these classics are living creatures in at least the sense that they seek out apertures through which to move. It is as if they were intelligent, looking for ingenious ways to get their point across to their readers. There are only a very few books that I know of that can do this, with the Tao Te Ching preeminent among them. Poetry works in this way, as do stories and tales, but not expository prose. The Gītā, however, manages this rare accomplishment, and I will leave it to the reader to figure out how it manages to do so.

The Bhagavad Gītā is the summation of the Vedānta, and among explicit doctrines the Vedānta stands out as one of the most direct formulations possible of what constitutes the very essence of our spirituality. Truth being one, the Gītā's teachings find their parallels in the other revealed scriptures, but nowhere else are its teachings so succinctly stated.

As Christopher Chapple has told us, the teachings of the Gītā are presented in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. The background of the battlefield imparts a dramatic charm. Sri Krishna, the teacher, is regarded by the Hindus as the Lord Himself in human form, and readers, absorbed in the book, often forget its historical character and feel as though many of its inspiring passages are directly addressed to themselves by the Lord who is the inner guide of us all. The suggestiveness of the book is almost without limit if it is read with the right attitude of mind.

The Gītā can be read as history, but it lends itself readily to being an allegory. In this mode, Arjuna represents the individual soul, and Sri Krishna the Supreme Soul that dwells in every heart. Arjuna's chariot is the body. The blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra is the mind under the spell of *maya*, ignorance, and his hundred sons are man's numerous evil tendencies. The battle is an eternal one that is always going on between the powers of good and the powers of evil. The warrior who listens to the advice of the Lord speaking from within will triumph in this battle and attain the Highest Good.

Hindu philosophers have never been satisfied with the mere intellectual understanding of religious treatises. Scripture is merely a key to the infinite storehouse of knowledge that lies within every human soul. And as for philosophy, its object is to enable the student to see the Truth—to realize it in direct experience. Hence certain moral and spiritual disciplines are necessary in order to create the right mood for study of both philosophy and the scriptures. Hinduism lays down such disciplines: discrimination between the Real and the unreal and renunciation of the unreal; and acquisition of the six virtues (control of the mind, control of the senses, restraining the mind from being distracted by worldly objects, faith in the scriptures and the words of the teacher, mental concentration, and lastly, the longing for liberation). Inwardness of spirit, cultivated through self-control and contemplation, enables the student of the scriptures to grasp their subtle meaning, which otherwise remains hidden from the merely intelligent reader.

It is an immemorial custom among Hindus to read the Gītā as a part of their daily devotions. Without it, prayer and meditation do not seem to be complete.

In the remaining pages of this foreword, I unpack the Gītā, so to speak. I divide its contents into segments that, pieced together, deliver the Gītā's message. These segments do not appear in the Gītā; they spin off from and expand the verse(s) of the Gītā that are noted at the end of each segment.

The Purpose of Life

Happiness derived from the fulfillment of worldly desires does not last. As one grows old, one realizes that everything is transient—wealth, possessions, health, and even life itself.

When money and the luxuries it can buy fail to bring lasting happiness, one begins to wonder what the cause of this discontent is. This inquiry leads to the discovery that besides the body and mind, there is another component of the human being that is less apparent and more important because it is more enduring and is always watching our activities. In spiritual texts the body-mind complex is called the Apparent Self and the more enduring component is called the Real Self. Eventually one realizes that the cause of the aforementioned discontent derives from attending to one's Apparent rather than one's Real Self, and that the purpose of life is to recognize this distinction and to identify oneself with one's Real Self (cf. Bhagavad Gītā, chapter 2, verse 66, hereafter BG II:66).

Crisis of Self-Identity

We have arms and legs; our five sense organs (hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell) are superior to those limbs because they control a wider range of activities. Our minds (which receive and store information) are superior to our sense organs because they generate and retrieve thoughts. Our intellects are superior to our minds because they process information, make decisions. However, superior to all of the foregoing is the soul which is the source of consciousness and life. It is the Real Self that was mentioned in the preceding paragraph (BG IV:242).

Who Am I?

The human soul contains a spark of the Divine, the key attributes of which are indestructibility, indivisibility, and infinity. There is but One Being, and in every human soul this one and the same being permeates fully, not partially, just as the entire sun is reflected in miniature in every dewdrop.

If every human soul has the same Divine spark, then all human beings are endowed with the same potential for goodness. The knowledge, understanding, and abiding awareness of the Divine spark in every human being—the aforementioned Real Self—is the foundation of all of the human virtues (BG XV:7).

The Human Soul

Human beings move tranquilly through childhood, youth, and maturity, but old age is not welcomed, and approaching death is feared. In truth, however, all of these stages should be welcomed equally, for the human soul reincarnates and repeats the same stages until it reaches its release from the physical body. When the soul reincarnates, it carries with it the impressions and inclinations that it has accumulated in its past lives (BG II:2 and II:13).

The Spiritual Quest

The physical world is constantly changing; it is a scene of perpetual perishing. Sages, however, through deep introspection, came to the conclusion that whatever

ceases to exist cannot be the ultimate reality. An all-pervading consciousness, which by its nature is eternal and indestructible, can alone be the ultimate reality. We catch glimpses of this all-pervading consciousness when we encounter people who show tremendous courage, extraordinary creativity, and boundless compassion (BG II:16–17).

Different Ways for Different Temperaments

There are several paths to spiritual realization. People are born with different temperaments and tendencies: some like to be active, others reflective, others affective and engaged with their feelings, and others (the show-me types) favor experiments (let's see what works). Spiritual paths exist for each of these four types. For the active there is the Way of Work, *karma yoga*; for the reflective there is the Way of Knowledge, *jñāna yoga*; for the affective type in whom sentiments prevail, there is the Way of Devotion, *bhakti yoga*; and for the experimental, let's-see-what-works type, there is the Way of Meditation, *raja yoga* (BG XIII:24–25).

Work without Attachment

One doesn't have to renounce the world to advance spiritually—one can remain fully engaged with family, social, and professional responsibilities. All one need do is to shift one's attention and motivation for what one does. Say one is a business person, attend to the duties of the day with disregard for what they will net one—that's all that need be done. Both the ignorant and the wise may do the same work, but the ignorant act with a selfish motive, and the wise act without expectation of any material gain (BG II:47 and III:25).

Unselfish Work—a Mind Purifier

Imagine a boy playing with his dog that has a curly tail. He tries to straighten the tail, but as soon as he lets go of it, it curls up again. The parts of our lives seem to behave like that—we straighten out one component, but then a curly tail takes it place. But take heart.

Mahatma Gandhi used nonviolent means to win India's independence from British rule. At his cottage in Sevagram a prayer meeting was held at which a verse of the Bhagavad Gītā was read. After the meetings, Gandhi would sit quietly for a few minutes with closed eyes, contemplating the verse. Many who attended those meetings were astonished to see the transformation in Gandhi's expression. His face often wore a look of pain that reflected the sufferings of his countrymen because of the cruelty of the rulers' deeds. After meditating on the Gītā, however, his face glowed with love and compassion for all. The secret of Gandhi's courage, calmness, and wisdom was his ability to reconnect his consciousness with the Divine—the source of infinite strength, infinite compassion, and infinite wisdom (BG II:48 and XII:13).

When Work Becomes Worship

Constant awareness of the presence of the Universal Spirit in everything can transform all work into worship. The mind becomes agitated and restless only when one works with a selfish motive. Work performed in the attitude of worship of the Universal Spirit purifies and calms the mind. It is a simple way to obtain peace of mind and enduring happiness (BG XVIII:46).

The Way of Knowledge

There are many kinds of knowledge. Secular knowledge does not take us beyond the material world—the world where everything is subject to change. It is impossible to find lasting happiness in things that are impermanent.

Deep introspection reveals that there is correspondence between the human being (the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm). One discovers that the spiritual component in human beings is identical with the Universal Spirit that pervades the phenomenal world.

As bliss is a primary attribute of the Universal Spirit, there must be a corresponding reservoir of happiness within all human beings. Those who seek enduring happiness must therefore guide their actions in the light of constant awareness of the divine presence in everything.

The journey toward spiritual realization is beset with hindrances as well as helps, and an uncontrolled mind is one of the major hindrances. It is not easy to discipline an unsteady mind, but constant awareness of one's identity with the Supreme Spirit is a tremendous source of strength, wisdom, and perseverance (BG XVIII:20 and XVIII:37).

Imprisoned in a Cage

Some desires must be met to keep us alive—the desires for food, water, and clothing. But our desires do not stop there, and striving for these additional desires does not bring us closer to lasting contentment. Superfluous desires are better called cravings. We become angry when our cravings are not fulfilled. Greed is the food that sustains cravings and feeds the ego. The ego is the cheerleader of cravings—it enshrines self-conceit, possessiveness, and jealousy (BG XVI:12–16).

The Anatomy of Human Descent

An uncontrolled mind, always craving gratification of sense pleasures, leads to disastrous consequences. Imagine a sense object that comes to one's attention. A desire arises to possess and enjoy that object. These thoughts create attachments and eventually craving. If the craving is not fulfilled, one becomes frustrated and angry, and angry people lose the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong, which in turn leads to a ruined life.

Spirituality begins with controlling one's desires and anger, which requires rigorous vigilance. Imagine that two notorious burglars, Desire and Anger, succeed in sneaking into a house—the burglars are adept at stealing the jewels of peace and happiness. The task of protecting those jewels which are within each one of us begins with control of the mind (BG II:62–63).

Intellect over Mind

The mind is inherently extroverted. The five sense organs continuously bombard the mind with messages from the outer world, and these messages create an uninterrupted flow of thought waves. This is the reason why an uncontrolled mind is never free from the propensities of desire, aversion, and anger. However, these propensities are obstructions for the ripening of wisdom; so it is essential to learn to interrupt this flow of thoughts by withdrawing the sense organs at will from their sense objects. To achieve the capacity to do this, the intellect must learn to exercise its supremacy over the mind.

Withdrawing the senses from sense objects enables the intellect to withhold identification with the mind's activities. This is how spiritual aspirants develop the art of noncooperation with the mind. When the mind counsels returning injury with injury, the intellect exercises its veto power and recommends returning injury with pardon. When the mind advises returning hatred with hatred, the intellect can decide to return wrongdoings with love and compassion.

However, even though withdrawing the senses from sense desires frees one from those desires, the taste for them lingers. Even the taste for worldly desires drops away when one directly experiences the Divine (BG II:58–59).

From Knowledge to Wisdom

Theoretical knowledge of the nature of the mind and how to control the mind is not enough. The spiritual path is slippery, and it does no good simply to carry the staff of knowledge-that-leads-to-wisdom—one must use that staff to steady oneself.

To change the analogy, the journey from knowledge to wisdom can be compared to the flight of a jet plane that struggles through thunderstorms at lower altitudes before reaching clear blue skies, where it flies smoothly and seemingly effortlessly (BG II:56).

From Wisdom to Peace

The attainment of wisdom is the hardest part of the spiritual journey. When that is accomplished, spiritual realization is very near.

A wise person is like an ocean that remains unmoved when rivers, even mighty one likes the Amazon, enter it. Having brought the mind under control, the wise person remains absorbed in the realm of spiritual consciousness where worldly desires knock but cannot enter. They are unswervingly aware of the fact that indestructibility, undivided consciousness, and bliss are the attributes of the Supreme Spirit (BG II:64 and II:70).

Which Is the Better Way?

Looking at a necklace of pearls, the eyes of the ignorant see pearls of different sizes and shapes, but they do not see the string that holds the pearls together. Something similar to that happens to a beginner who is seeking knowledge of the existence of the Supreme Spirit. The spiritual search leads to the discovery that actually there is no place in the universe where the Supreme Spirit is absent. In fact, like pearls of a necklace, the whole universe is pervaded and held together by the indwelling presence of one and the same Spirit.

It is possible but extremely difficult to comprehend the Divine Reality through knowledge alone. The prerequisite for attaining steady wisdom is a pure mind; but purification of the mind is a slow and arduous task, requiring virtues like truthfulness, honesty, and compassion.

The Way of Unselfish Work and the Way of Knowledge are two of the four ways for purifying the mind. The Way of Meditation and the Way of Devotion are the other two. Each of the ways enables the aspirant to realize the Spiritual Unity behind the apparent diversity in the universe. They are four paths to the same summit (BG V:1 and V:4).

The Way of Meditation

Those who are following either the Way of Knowledge or the Way of Unselfish Work soon discover that cravings of the mind for worldly pleasures are the greatest obstacle to spiritual realization. It is the habit of the mind to wander around in the outside world all the time. That habit can be broken by shifting the mind to the indwelling consciousness whose bliss can be attained by deep contemplation, succinctly known as meditation.

Spiritual bliss is far superior to the transient pleasures of everyday life, and meditation is the gate that opens that bliss to us. The indwelling Spirit can be experienced by cutting the chains that bind us to the world of matter, and it is meditation that does the cutting.

To change the analogy, the mind is like a lake, and stones that are dropped into it raise waves. Those waves do not let us see who we are. A full moon may be reflected in the water of the lake, but if the lake's surface is troubled we do not see the moon clearly. The waters must be calmed. If one remains quiet, eventually the winds that ruffle the water will give up, and then one knows who one is. God is constantly within us, but the mind obscures that fact with agitated waves of worldly desires. Meditation quiets those waves (BG V:28).

Preparation for Meditation

The powers of the human mind tend to be dissipated like rays of light. Scientists have shown us that it is possible to unlock the secrets of nature by the powers of concentrated minds. Likewise, by using the mind as a powerful instrument mystics have been able to discover profound spiritual truths. As we have seen, meditation is the

method by which human beings can learn how to control and empower their minds for the spiritual journey.

The prerequisite for meditation is a firm resolve to adhere to moral values that help to purify the mind—truthfulness, noninjury, and noncovetousness. This resolve prepares one to mount the steps that ascend toward meditation. The first of these is purity, internal and external. The second step involves relaxing the mind by breathing rhythmically, *prāṇāyāma*. The final step is to withdraw the mind from the senses that monitor the external world and turn it toward the object of one's concentration (BG VI:12).

Meditation—the Method

Meditation needs something to focus on. It can be the manifestation of Divinity in religious symbol, in a human form, or in nature, such as a snow-covered mountain, a serene lake in moonlight, or a colorful horizon at sunrise or sunset. The focus can also be holy words or syllables that are intoned as *mantras* and rhythmically repeated—the repetitions can be audible, inaudible (lips move but no sound is uttered), or mental (contemplation on the meaning of the *mantra*).

In the state of deep meditation the mind is completely detached from the outgoing senses and is fully submerged in the indwelling Divine Spirit, which in full glory is reflected in the mind only when it is totally free of all disturbances. When the mind loses all sense of being a separate identity, it enters into *samādhi*, a superconscious state where one savors bliss that endures. Success in reaching this state and making it endure can be achieved with practice (BG VI:18–19 and VI:21–22).

The Way of Devotion

Whether one follows the path of knowledge, or unselfish work, or meditation, the spiritual journey is difficult—it is like crossing mountain ranges by driving a car over a zigzagging road with numerous curves and many ups and downs.

But if one is impatient to complete the journey, there is another way. In this analogy there is a shortcut, a tunnel that cuts through the base of the mountain. In the spiritual journey this shortcut is called the Way of Devotion. Before one enters this tunnel the wayfarer must have faith that there will be light at its end. This way is for those who have emotional temperaments suitable for developing intense love and deep yearning (BG VIII:22; IX:31 and IX:34).

Love and Devotion

The spiritualized mind, also known as the pure heart, is the seat of Divine emotions. Spiritual seekers of emotional temperament adore Divinity and seek heart unity with their chosen Divine ideal. Only a devotee with a pure heart can achieve it. Unconditional love is a potent purifier of the heart's emotions because it washes away the desire for trivial and transient objects.

Emotional devotees water the plant of devotion with tears of love. In true love, every act of the devotee becomes an act of worship (BG IX:26).

The Merging of the Ways

When one sees the entire universe as pervaded by the single Universal Spirit, one contemplates, marvels, and falls in love with its amazing glory. This love eventually turns into deep devotion and an intense yearning for direct knowledge of the Supreme Reality.

Moved by the intensity of one's devotion, one's chosen ideal will at last grant one a direct experience of the Supreme Reality, which is likewise the Supreme Truth. Having experienced that Truth oneself, all doubts are dispelled. This is how the flower of devotion evolves into the fruit of knowledge. When the paths of knowledge and devotion come together, they intermingle and strengthen each other. True devotion merges with true knowledge. Actually, one cannot truly know anything that one does not truly love (BG X:10–11).

The Power of Maya

Imagine a child playing by the side of a pond that is covered by algae. He pushes the algae aside to see the water beneath it. As soon as he glimpses the water, a puff of wind covers the water with algae again. He repeats his act again and again with the same result. Finally he tires of the game and turns away. The spiritual aspirant who wants to climb to the top of the mountain of self-realization without help will have a similar experience.

The truth of the matter is that one's own efforts are not sufficient to keep the mind in a steady state. Work without attachment to results can protect the mind from sensory distractions, but the imagined desires will still arise in the mind and disturb its tranquility. Even these imagined desires however, subside when the mind tastes the Divine bliss.

One seems to be caught in a vicious circle—without the Divine nectar, minds do not become completely pure, and without completely purified minds, the reservoir of Divine nectar is inaccessible. One waits, hoping that at some point success will be attained (BG VII:14).

Overcoming Hurdles

Self-effort is not enough to overcome all the hurdles that arise in the spiritual journey. Who would dare to leap across deep chasms, wade through rushing torrents, and climb across razor-sharp cliffs without help from others?

Like fast-moving clouds covering the sun, agitations of the mind are always ready to disturb the intellect. Delusions of the mind cannot be completely overcome by self-effort. The only way to overcome those delusions is to seek refuge in the Supreme Spirit with unyielding faith. It is important not to let one's pride and egotism bar one from the total surrender to the Supreme (BG XVIII:58 and XVIII: 66).

Self-Surrender and Divine Grace

A camel eats thorny brambles and its mouth bleeds. This does not keep him away from those brambles because the camel cannot control its nature. Bound by *their* nature, human beings likewise suffer innumerable sorrows, and no matter how hard they try, they are unable to free themselves from the shackles of the world. The only way out is to seek Divine help and surrender oneself to its ministrations (BG XVIII:62).

Arriving at the Destination

Spiritual life is about the spiritualizing of knowledge, love, and work. It proceeds through human effort supported by Divine grace. As a familiar Hindu adage has it, the winds of God's love are constantly blowing, but one must raise one's sail. Still, the question remains: to reach what destination?

Destinations are the termini of journeys that have starting points. Physicists think that the universe began with the Big Bang, but what caused that Bang? Mystics say that it was God, the heart that beats in the body of the universe. In "East Coker," T. S. Eliot notes that "our end is in our beginning," and sages in India coined a composite word to describe the end that is also the beginning, *sat-chit-ānanda*: Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss. It is important to keep in mind that these are not three things; they are three attributes of the single Reality. And thus the conclusion of this journey through the Bhagavad Gītā is Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss (BG XVIII:65).

EDITOR'S PREFACE

with a User's Guide to the Word-by-Word
Analysis of the Bhagavad Gītā

The Bhagavad Gītā is one of the most studied and most translated texts in the history of world literature. Emerging from post-Vedic India, it has made its mark as a standard, almost universal work of the Hindu tradition. It also has intrigued and eluded interpreters outside India for over two centuries. Some are fascinated by its linguistic contribution; others are interested in sorting out the many philosophical and religious implications of the text. Part of the appeal of the Gītā, both at home in India and abroad, lies in its multivalent quality: it explicitly advances numerous teachings, some of them seemingly contradictory, and has been used in support of various others that have arisen since its composition. As Gerald Larson has noted, “The *Gītā* has been construed in all sorts of interpretive modalities, most of which can be argued to be more or less authentic and legitimate.” In this brief introduction, a sketch of the story line is given, followed by an assessment of how the many possible construals of the text in fact reflect the uniquely Hindu worldview that tolerates and in some cases requires holding together multiple positions simultaneously.

The Bhagavad Gītā tells a story of great crisis, a crisis that is solved through the interaction between Arjuna, a Pāṇḍava warrior hesitating before battle, and Krishna, his charioteer and teacher. The Gītā is included in the sixth book (*Bhīṣmaparvan*) of the Mahābhārata and documents one tiny event in a gargantuan epic tale. The main plot of the larger work involves a dispute between cousins over rulership of the Kurukṣetra kingdom in north central India. The kingdom had been lost by five brothers, the Pāṇḍavas, during a dice game and ceded to their cousins, the hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. By prearranged agreement, the latter group was due to give back rulership to the five Pāṇḍava brothers, but refused to abide by the contract. The Pāṇḍavas are forced to wage war in order to regain their rightful territory. However, these two sets of cousins were raised together and shared the same teachers. The prospect of war between the two camps is especially repugnant because so many good friends and close relatives must be killed. Thus, we arrive at the opening of the Bhagavad Gītā, the moment just before the battle begins. Arjuna is thrust into crisis; he must face the anguish of killing his relatives and friends or allow himself to be killed.

The text begins with the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra asking his minister Saṁjaya to tell him what is happening on the field of the Kurus, the battlefield. Saṁjaya proceeds to list the principal warriors on the field and then directs his focus to Arjuna and his

charioteer Krishna. Arjuna asks Krishna to place the chariot in the center of the field and then sees arrayed before him his teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and friends. The sight overwhelms him; it is clear that all will be slain. Thinking that if all is destroyed then kingdom and pleasure would be of no use, he throws down his bow, refusing to fight, his mind overcome with grief. In the chapters that follow, Krishna takes Arjuna on a philosophical journey, bringing into question Arjuna's attachment to both himself and others. The dialogue builds until Arjuna receives from Krishna a vision of totality that liberates him from his prior self-preoccupied identity. This experience prompts Arjuna to seek new answers from Krishna, answers that explain how to live with an understanding in which action becomes purposeful and liberating.

How does Krishna exact the transformation of Arjuna from a man filled with doubt to a man of great knowledge and resolve? He begins in chapter 2 by explaining the Yoga of Knowledge, recounting to Arjuna the insights to be gained from Sāṃkhya philosophy. He reminds him that although contact with the objects of sense produces pleasure and pain, both are not lasting (II:14). He speaks of that which is beyond all change: weapons do not cut it; fire does not burn it; water does not wet it; winds do not dry it (II:23). He tells Arjuna that as a warrior his duty is to fight. If he wins, he gains the earth, if he loses, he gains heaven (II:37). Krishna urges Arjuna to ready himself for battle, to regard pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and failure as the same. Only when Arjuna has renounced interest in the fruits of his action can he find true peace.

These sage words, however, are not enough to prompt Arjuna into action. As will happen again and again over several more chapters, Arjuna asserts to Krishna that this teaching is not enough, that his mind is still confused, that he needs to hear a better path. Although the reasons provided by Krishna are certainly sufficient for Arjuna to move into battle, they remain empty theories; Arjuna is unable to act. So Krishna persists. In the third chapter, the Yoga of Action, Arjuna is advised to perform the action that has to be done, staying always free from attachment (III:19). Krishna points out that it was by action alone that Janaka, the philosopher-king, attained perfection and tells Arjuna that he should act, attending to the holding together of the world (*loka-saṃgraha*) (III:20). Bringing to mind the Sāṃkhya system, he reiterates that actions are done by the *guṇas* of *prakṛti* alone; it is only the deluded one who thinks "I am the doer" (III:27). By knowing that all this is only the *guṇas*, one becomes free from attachment. When asked by Arjuna why a man is impelled to do evil, Krishna responds that desire and anger, born of passion (*rajas*), conceal true knowledge and fuel the senses. Only by subduing the senses and controlling the mind can desire be overcome.

In a discourse on the Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge in the fourth chapter, Krishna provides yet another teaching. He explains that one must see action in inaction and inaction in action; only then can one be free of compulsive desire. This is accomplished by renouncing the fruit of action (*karma-phala-asaṅga*), leading to constant satisfaction and independence. Such a one is said to do nothing, even though engaged in action (IV:20). Sacrifice is cited as the model for proper action; the sacrifice of knowledge (*jñāna-yajña*) is said to bring the completion of all action (IV:33). In the fifth chapter, the Yoga of Renunciation, Krishna further articulates

the need for the relinquishment of attachment, saying that the wise ones see a cow, an elephant, a dog, an outcaste, and even a learned and wise Brahmin as the same (V:18). He describes the sage intent on release as one whose senses, mind, and intelligence are controlled, who has overcome desire, fear, and anger; such a one is forever liberated (V:28). The means to achieve this are described in yet another teaching, the Yoga of Meditation. To gain *yoga*, Krishna advises “Abandoning those desires whose origins lie in one’s intention, all of them without exception, and completely restraining the multitude of senses with the mind; little by little he should come to rest, with the intelligence firmly grasped. His mind having been fixed in the self, he should not think of anything” (VI:24–25). Krishna assures Arjuna that even a small amount of practice will be beneficial.

As before, none of these teachings resolves Arjuna’s crisis. Hence, Krishna continues. In the next four chapters, Krishna tells Arjuna of the highest self, attainable through Krishna himself. In the Yoga of Knowledge and Discrimination, Krishna distinguishes between the lower *prakṛti*, which is the world of the senses and the mind, and the higher *prakṛti*, from which all life emerges. Both are said to have their origin in Krishna, who is the “seed of all beings.” He declares that even those who sacrifice to lesser gods in fact sacrifice to Krishna, but their fruit is of little consequence. “To the gods the god-worshipping go; My worshippers go surely to me” (VII:23). In the Yoga of Imperishable Brahman, Krishna explains *puruṣa* as the support of things, the vision to be attained, “within which all beings stand, by which all this universe is pervaded” (VIII:22). In knowing this, all fruits of action are transcended and peace is attained. In the Yoga of Royal Knowledge and of Royal Mystery, the ninth chapter, Krishna speaks of the *prakṛti* that he issues forth. Those who see the higher *prakṛti* through sacrifice and devotion make their offerings to Krishna: he is witness, the final shelter; the origin, dissolution, and foundation; immortality; existence and nonexistence; the enjoyer of all sacrifices. In chapter 10, the Yoga of Manifestation, Krishna explains the nature of his compassion: by appearing as so many gods, sages, trees, horses, weapons, demons, mantras, warriors, rivers, victories, Vedic hymns, and more, he has proven to be the manifestation of all that is worthy of worship, all that inspires ascension to the true self. At the end, he declares, “I support this entire universe constantly with a single fraction of Myself” (X:42).

Finally, after so much preparation and so many discourses, Arjuna asks Krishna in chapter 11 to reveal the form that is described as Lord and Highest Self. He asks for a direct experience, a showing (*darśana*): “If Thou thinkest it possible for me to see this, O Lord, Prince of Yoga, then to me cause to be seen Thyself, the Imperishable” (XI:4). In response, Krishna reveals to Arjuna the vision that he has requested. “If there should be in the sky a thousand suns risen all at once, such splendor would be of the splendor of that Great Being” (XI:12). The vision is without beginning or end; all worlds are pervaded by it. The gods stand in amazement, singing praise. Into Krishna’s many mouths, studded with terrible tusks “glowing like the fires of universal destruction,” are cast all the players on the battlefield: the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the sage Bhīṣma, the teacher Droṇa, and all the others. Having revealed what time will bring, Krishna tells Arjuna to stand up, to conquer his enemies. “By Me these have already been struck down; be the mere instrument” (XI:33). Overwhelmed

by Krishna's powers, Arjuna praises him as the first of gods, the primal *puruṣa*, the knower and what is to be known. After expressing homage and obeisance, he asks Krishna to return to his human form, and the dialogue once more resumes, but with a difference.

Arjuna has now had direct experience of what has been so lavishly praised and described by Krishna. The true self is no longer a theoretical abstraction but has been revealed in embodied form. From chapters 12 through 18, Arjuna no longer implores Krishna for definite answers about what he should or should not do. Rather than focusing on his own selfish concerns, Arjuna asks for further explanations on the nature of the devotion by which he has been given his vision. He asks Krishna to talk more about the difference between *puruṣa*, the knower of the field, and *prakṛti*, the field of change. He asks more about the three *guṇas* and how they function within *prakṛti*; he finds out how the yogins see the highest self through the eye of wisdom. Krishna elucidates the distinction between liberating and binding conditions and then, in the concluding chapter, explains the Yoga of Freedom by Renunciation. The contents of the chapter reflect concerns that Krishna has addressed consistently since the second chapter: sacrifice of the fruits of action, the distinctions of the *guṇas*, the cultivation of equanimity, the importance of nondoership.

The pivotal verse of the last chapter, indicating that Krishna's task as teacher has been completed, is as follows: "Thus to thee by Me has been expounded the knowledge that is more secret than secret. Having reflected on this fully, do as thou desirest" (XVIII:63). Until this point, even after receiving the vision of totality, Arjuna has regarded Krishna as his teacher and relied utterly on him for guidance and instruction. Krishna's command "Do as thou desirest!" signals that Arjuna's knowledge has now been fully embodied, that he has reached the point where he can in full conscience act without hesitation. His decisions become his own. Arjuna's final statement, notable for its first resolve in contrast to his lack of nerve in the first chapter, is this: "Delusion is lost and wisdom gained, through Thy grace, by me, Unchanging One. I stand with doubt dispelled. I shall do as Thy command" (XVIII:73). Arjuna, at the conclusion of the *Gītā*, is free to act.

In our brief overview of the Bhagavad *Gītā*, we have encountered a multiplicity of teaching. Arjuna stated his anguish in chapter 1 and, for the next nine chapters, received plausible advice from Krishna. Considered separately, it might even seem that any one of the nine *yogas* prescribed in those chapters by Krishna would be sufficient for Arjuna to solve his dilemma. However, all these *yogas* as well as everything else are ultimately negated by the vision of the True Self provided in chapter 11. In the final chapters, these teachings, and in fact the world itself, are resurrected in service of an enlightened way of detached action.

The unfolding of the *Gītā* may be summarized in four movements: the crisis of Arjuna in chapter 1, his instruction by Krishna in chapters 2 through 10, the revelation of chapter 11, and then continued instruction in chapters 12 through 18. It might be supposed that the enlightenment experience of chapter 11 would be for Arjuna an eschatological event, that his vision of Krishna as Lord would utterly transform his relationship with the world, thus putting an end to any need for further teaching. But this is simply not the case: the vision is followed by further affirmation of what

Krishna has taught, a sequence of chapters “which show the ‘rehabilitation’ process of a man who has seen the emptiness beyond his own old structures of meaning and does not know yet how to proceed in the interpretation of the new” (de Nicolás, 273). Furthermore, if we look at the larger story of Arjuna as it unfolds in the great epic, even the autonomy that Arjuna achieves in chapter 18 does not help him when he attempts to enter heaven; the lessons of the *Gītā* must be repeated again and again, as new circumstances, new worlds, arise and fall.

Herein lies one of the special contributions of the Bhagavad *Gītā*: the religious vision, like the Hindu conception of life itself, is a forever repeating experience. The instruction Arjuna received before his enlightening vision remains essential following this experience, and is also deemed helpful for all who heed it. This is illustrated in the final verse of the text, in which Saṁjaya poetically proclaims: “Wherever there is Krishna, Lord of Yoga, wherever there is the Son of Pṛthā, the archer (Arjuna), there, there will surely be splendor, victory, wealth, and righteousness; this is my thought” (XVIII:78).

Theologically, the approach presented in the *Gītā* differs from generally accepted notions about *mokṣa* as requiring the renunciation of the world and of *samādhi* as trance-like obliteration of all things and thoughts. The *Gītā* presents a view of religious practice at variance with the classical tradition as found in the Dharmaśāstra, a view that Madeleine Biardeau attributes to a more open conception of liberation characteristic of the later sections of the Mahābhārata. She writes that this new approach

gave every svadharma (one’s own duty) religious content and an access to ultimate salvation. The Brahmanic model was not lost sight of, but was generalized so as to fit all other categories of Hindu society, including Sudras, women, and all impure castes. Once the kṣatriya gained access to salvation through his . . . activities, the generalization became easy. . . . Nothing was outside the realm of ultimate values, though at the same time the status of the Brahmins remains unimpaired.(77)

As Biardeau points out, it is no longer one path, the path leading from studentship to householding to renunciation to blessedness that enables one to lead a full religious life. In the model presented by the Bhagavad *Gītā*, every aspect of life is in fact a way of salvation. Krishna tells Arjuna of innumerable ways to achieve peace of mind, to resolve his dilemma, and it is clear that the answers are provided not only for Arjuna but are paradigmatic for people of virtually any walk of life. The *Gītā* becomes a text appropriate to all persons of all castes or no caste; its message transcends the limits of classical Hinduism.

It is interesting to note that just as Krishna presented many perspectives to Arjuna, so have many scholars, both traditional and modern, held many perspectives on the Bhagavad *Gītā*. Robert N. Minor, whose own position is that “the *Gītā* proclaims as its highest message the lordship of Kṛṣṇa and the highest response of the human being to that lordship is devotion, *bhakti*” (xvi), notes several different usages of the text. For Śaṅkara (AD 788–820), the message is the “end of the world and its accompanying activity.” Madhusudana and Venkatanātha, while not rejecting Śaṅkara’s view, place more emphasis on devotion, as does Jñāneśvara, the Marathi commentator. Bhaskara

takes issue with Śaṅkara's interpretation, asserting that the world is a real aspect of Brahman. Rāmānuja used the Gītā in support of his position that "the true self is not divine and not one with the other selves." Nimbārka, a twelfth-century thinker, prompted interpretations that see Krishna as teaching "innate nonidentity in identity." Madhva (1238–1317), the famous dualist, "radically reinterprets the text so that it asserts an eternal and complete distinction between the Supreme, the many souls, and matter and its divisions." Minor also cites modern interpretations by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas K. Gandhi, who used the text to help inspire the independence movement, and Sri Aurobindo, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Swami Vivekananda, who took a syncretistic approach to the text (xvi–xix).

Few of the scholars cited here seem to agree on the meaning of the text, yet none of them can be said to be incorrect. It may be argued that this utter contextualization of the text causes it to fall into a fatal relativism; that the text, because it is open to so many interpretations and has been used to confirm opposing positions ranging from Śaṅkara's monism to Madhva's dualism, is trivial and perhaps meaningless. But how, then, could such a text survive? How can one account for or even describe a text that includes and is used to support a virtual cacophony of traditions and positions? Setting aside even the interpretations of the aforementioned later commentators, how can the explicitly nontheistic Sāṃkhya appear alongside with the thoroughly theistic *bhakti* approach also taught by Krishna?

Max Mueller addressed a similar issue when trying to cope with the multiplicity of gods in the R̥g Veda and invented a term to describe it:

To identify Indra, Agni, and Varuna is one thing, it is syncretism; to address either Indra or Agni or Varuna, as for the time being the only god in existence with an entire forgetfulness of all other gods, is quite another; it was this phase, so fully developed in the hymns of the Veda which I wished to mark definitely by a name of its own, calling it henotheism. (40)

The Vedic method which extols different gods within the same text is similar to that employed in the Bhagavad Gītā, in which each time Arjuna asks Krishna for one truth, again and again Krishna offers Arjuna yet another perspective, another chapter, another *yoga*. Each view, whether that of a god being sacrificed to or a yogic discipline being practiced, is given life as long as it proves effective. Multiplicity is the rule, with one god, one perspective gaining and holding ascendancy as long as it, he, or she proves efficacious. That one is then swept from its elevated position as new situations, new questions emerge: and yet, if pressed, a Hindu will always admit, of course, Indra is best; of course, Agni is best; of course, Varuna is best; of course, Karma Yoga is best; of course, Bhakti Yoga is best.

Paul Hacker has referred to the accommodation of multiple teachings within one tradition as "inclusivism." Antonio T. de Nicolás has explained this phenomenon philosophically as

a systematic and methodic effort to save rationality in its plural manifestations through an activity of embodiment that emancipates man from any form of

identification, allowing him the freedom to act efficiently in any one identifiable field in the social fabric. (164)

Just as the many gods of the Vedas are effective in different situations, so the many *yogas* are prescribed in the Gītā without compromising or subordinating one to another. Mutual paths are allowed to exist in complementarity.

In a sense, the Gītā is composed in the spirit of the Jaina approach to truth. The Jainas assert that every statement is an utterance of partial truth; all postulation is rendered senseless by the ultimate postulate that no words are ever totally adequate to experience (*avaktavya eva*). Similarly, Krishna painstakingly guides Arjuna through many *yogas*, yet, the entire problematic is obliterated when Krishna reveals his true form to Arjuna. All the words, all the individual personalities and collective armies are swallowed up by the gaping mouth of Krishna, the origin and dissolution of all things. The net result is that all possibilities are present for Arjuna when he gains the knowledge that all are impermanent.

The Bhagavad Gītā sets forth a multiplicity of possible paths. A panoply of perspectives is offered to the reader in a nonjudgmental way; the many positions proposed by Krishna do not necessarily compete with one another but rather complete one another. If one needs to act, one uses Karma Yoga; if one needs to meditate, one uses Dhyāna Yoga. This “henocretic” text is written with a gentle tolerance, allowing various practices and positions to be pursued.

In a manner true to the construction of the text itself, the present rendition by Winthrop Sargeant does the least violence to the original of all the translations of the Gītā with which I am familiar. He shows the reader the possibilities offered by the text, setting out in menu form variant English-language samplings for each of the Sanskrit terms. His work makes a unique contribution, inviting the reader to sample the translation he serves up, but also inviting the reader to experiment with creating his or her own delicacy.

USER'S GUIDE FOR THE WORD-BY-WORD ANALYSIS OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

Reaching into another culture, whether the ancient phase of one's own people or the heritage of ancestors other than one's own, requires a spirit of adventure and inquiry. Texts, whether the Bible or the Confucian Analects or the Bhagavad Gītā, often serve as the portal or entry point for engaging and comprehending a worldview. However, any attempt to understand a text carries the risk of missing the mark. To know the meanings of the words of any book does not guarantee understanding of authorial intent or how others following the author have interpreted the text. As we reach back in history the context can easily shift. For religious texts even one simple turn of phrase can generate multiple redactions.

The Bhagavad Gītā, as noted in the translator's preface to this book, has given rise to nearly countless interpretations, from A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's assertion of the primacy of Lord Krishna rooted in the Dvaita theology of Madhva to Antonio T.

de Nicolás’s perspectival reading of the text based on the existential insights of Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset. For Mahatma Gandhi, the text designed to gird the warrior Arjuna for battle became an inspiration for India’s nonviolent revolution. Reader, take your place, perhaps take sides, and take heart that this book can serve many people in many ways.

Sargeant situates the place of the Gītā within the context of Sanskrit literary history, indicating its use of participles, finite conjugated verbs, rules of euphonic or sound combination (*samdhī*), and the complex systems of noun endings (declensions) and compounds (pages 3–8). In the very first edition of this book, Sargeant provided a simple word equivalent for each Sanskrit term with some identification of the grammatical part of speech. In the editions of 1984 and 1994, I provided a deeper analysis of each term, locating its verbal root origin where possible. I also expanded the range of possible meanings for each word, following a convention also observed in translating Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* (see my *Yoga and the Luminous*, 143–215). This approach gives the reader the toolbox of approaches available to the translator and provides an opportunity for the reader to develop his or her own rendering of the text within a range of reasonable possibilities.

Each translator brings a distinct methodology to the task. One of my favorite translations of the Bhagavad Gītā is perhaps also the most inscrutable. Franklin Edgerton not only translates every single term, including the now widely accepted and understood terms *karma* and *dharma*, but he also retained Sanskrit word order, stretching the English language into amazing contortions that rival the most advanced *yoga* poses. Christopher Isherwood and Swami Prabhavananda alternate between prose and verse renderings, utterly at variance with the original cadence and word order. George Thompson surmises that the text was primarily recited or sung and chooses a simplified word flow that sounds melodious and clear in the English language. My own training in classical *yoga* included the memorization of the 1943 Gita Press translation of the second chapter of the Gītā, replete with such neologisms as “car-warriors” for what Thompson renders “great chariot warriors” (35) and “self-controlled practican” for what Patton renders as “that person whose thought is placid” (65). In an attempt to capture a hint of the cadence of the original *śloka* construction, a lilting, symmetrical play of four sets of eight syllables in each verse, Laurie Patton stretches each verse into eight lines.

As one example of choices made by three translators, we will consider verse II:49. This verse includes a key technical term employed in the original, *buddhi-yoga*, indicating the importance of the first emanation of *prakṛti* (the creative matrix), which is the *buddhi*. *Buddhi*, related to the word Buddha or Awakened One, is often translated as the “intellect.” In Sāṃkhya philosophy, the *buddhi* also carries the residues of all past *karma* in the form of enduring inclinations or the state of being known as the *bhāvas*. It determines the state or mood into which one awakens. In Sāṃkhya, as in the second chapter of the Gītā, the modality of knowledge (*jñāna*) within the *buddhi* guarantees freedom.

Sargeant renders this verse:

Action is inferior by far
To the Yoga of intuitive determination,

Conqueror of Wealth (Arjuna).
Seek refuge in intuitive determination!
Despicable are those whose motives
are based on the fruit of action.

Sargeant attempts to retain vestiges of the *śloka* form by dividing the verse into four lines. He also retains the epithet for Arjuna while also making clear to the reader that Krishna is addressing Arjuna, who has many nicknames.

Thompson does not attempt to retain the versification in a literal sense, but divides his translation into three discrete sentences:

Arjuna, action is far inferior to the yoga of insight. Seek refuge in insight. Those
whose goal is the fruits of their actions wind up miserable.

Thompson, for the sake of clarity, eliminates all of Arjuna's variant names and makes a very different word choice for the term *buddhi*.

Patton agrees with the usage of the term *insight* for *buddhi* and retains the epithet for Arjuna. She stretches out the versification:

Winner of Wealth,
action is far inferior
to the *yoga* of insight.
Look for refuge
in insight;
for those who are
motivated by fruits
are to be pitied.

Her choice of the term *pitied* stays closer to the original than either *despicable* or *miserable*. From all three translations, we get the sense that thinking or reflection is better than acting on one's first impulse for the sake of greed or desire or selfishness.

If we turn to the Sanskrit analysis, the original grouping of the terms can be clearly discerned:

dūreṇa hyavaram karma
buddhiyogād dhanamjaya
buddhau saranam anviccha
kṛpāṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ

As previously noted, the *buddhi* holds the history of one's past actions. Without using insight or intuitive determination, one might plunge headlong into the performance of action motivated solely by yearning for its fruits (*phalahetu*) rather than taking into account the larger picture. By seeing the prominence of the term *buddhi* at the start of the second and third lines, and by feeling the impact of the imperative verbs "seek! wish for! desire!" at the end of the second line, scrutiny of the Sanskrit can help deepen the understanding

of the reader. Additionally, the reader can see the framing of ideas contained within the verse. The opening and closing lines refer to the problem to be overcome: attachment to the fruits of action. The middle two lines exhort the reader to recognize the solution: applying and taking refuge in a disciplined (*yoga*) intellect (*buddhi*).

Through a careful and creative scanning of the Sanskrit terms provided by Sargeant, variants of key terms such as *yoga*, *karma*, and *jñāna* will be easily discerned. These include *yoked* (*yukta*), *origin* or *cause of action* (*kāraṇam*), and *knower* (*jñā*). The lilt, appeal, and genius of the Gītā's composer lie in the gentle word play of the text. By examining the text repeatedly at a leisurely pace, one can gain a friendly familiarity with this classic of world religious literature.

Mahatma Gandhi, according to his secretary Narayan Desai, committed to memory and recited daily the last nineteen verses of the second chapter, using them as a companion in his quest for social justice (lecture presented at Loyola Marymount University, October 9, 2008). Similarly, one might develop a favorite section of the text for deeper study and reflection.

To fully utilize the tools set forth in this edition, the reader might want to apply the following steps:

1. Sound out the words from the transliterated Sanskrit, following the pronunciation guide on pages 5–8.
2. Make note of words that seem familiar, such as *prakṛti*, *puruṣa*, *duḥkha*, *karma*, *dharma*, *yoga*, *jñāna*, and so forth.
3. Scan the English paraphrase directly beneath the Sanskrit text, taking notice of words that seem important or intriguing. The paraphrase follows the Sanskrit word order.
4. Consult the detailed assessment in the right-hand column for words of interest. Over the course of several verses, some of the words will repeat and become familiar.
5. Read with greater understanding the Sargeant translation. Pay attention to his final word choice in light of various options. For instance, the word *vega* in VI:23 can be translated as “agitation, impetus, shock, momentum, onset, orgasm.” Sargeant chooses the word *agitation* for his translation. Patton chooses *shock*. The Gita Press version selects the word *urges*. De Nicolás translates *vega* as *force*, while van Buitenen uses *driving force*. Which do you prefer?
6. Go a step further. Can you find the word *vega* in your own experience? Which emotion do you find lying behind or associated with desire and anger? Use this technique with other passages.
7. Find a verse or set of verses that hold your interest or attention. Scan the words as suggested here. Compare Sargeant's translation with one or two others. Use the word analysis section in Sargeant's translation to understand the word choices made by the other translator(s). Decide upon your own preference.
8. Develop a collection of verses from the Bhagavad Gītā that you find particularly important. Use the ample white space on each page to copy alternate translations and to develop your own translation and commentary.

9. Search out a study group on the Bhagavad Gītā. Consider enrolling in a Sanskrit language class at a nearby college, university, or *yoga* center.

Winthrop Sargeant (1903–1986) served for many decades as the premier music writer for *The New Yorker*. His personal fascination with Indian philosophy, not related in any way to his livelihood, resulted in this labor of love. Sargeant's Gītā was created by a nonspecialist for all persons interested in this classic book. Tens of thousands of people throughout the world have benefited from his careful rendering and analysis of the text. Through his efforts, the elite and arcane world of complex Sanskrit grammar has been made accessible to a wide audience. A classic work of world literature has found new expression, with tools to facilitate greater understanding. By reaching deeply into this text, we extend ourselves back through history into an appreciation of the path trod by our civilizational ancestors in India and perhaps into a deeper sense of self-understanding.

It has been an honor working with this edition of the book. My sole contribution has been editing the grammatical analysis for consistency and completeness; any errors or omissions that occur are my own.

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THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Why add one more to the numerous English translations of the Bhagavad Gītā? It is said to have already been translated at least two hundred times, in both poetic and prose forms. My excuse is that, though many fine translations exist, none that I know of presents the original Sanskrit with an interlinear word-for-word arrangement that permits the reader to learn the sound as well as the meaning of each word. The arrangement also makes it possible for the reader to see the metrical formation of the poem's stanzas, and their grammatical structure. It should also enable the studious reader to savor something of the original language, which is elegant and extremely concise. As an added aid, a running vocabulary is provided, referring to the Sanskrit words on each page, along with their grammatical forms. Below each stanza will be found a readable English translation which I hope will give greater coherence to what is often awkwardly expressed in the literal word-for-word interlinear translation. The line of transliteration is designed to show the reader how the words are pronounced, so that, if he desires, he can appreciate the sound of the original language. In making the readable translation that appears at the bottom of each page, my object has been to stick as closely as possible to literal meaning rather than to attempt a masterpiece of English prose. Such grand poetic concepts as appear in the translation are inherent in the poem. I have added nothing, and what I have striven for is simple clarity along with a reproduction of something of the force and economy of the original.

I have consulted numerous previous translations, among them those of Franklin Edgerton, S. Radhakrishnan, Eliot Deutsch, Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, and Swami Chidbhavananda, Juan Mascaro and P. Lal. I have found them all worth reading, each, as I suppose is inevitable, showing a slightly different approach. To a poem such as this, many approaches are possible, and all are worth considering. I have tried in the vocabularies to indicate a considerable variety of possible meaning. In writing the introductory chapters on language, cosmology and psychology, and the setting of the poem as the principal didactic jewel of the great Hindu epic, the Mahābhārata, I have had recourse to numerous sources – Pratap Chandra Roy's translation of the Epic, Chakravarti Narasimhan's "The Mahābhārata," C. Rajagopalachari's condensed version, the account given under various headings in Benjamin Walker's "The Hindu World," and in connection with other matters I have consulted the admirable prefaces to Swami Nikhilananda's "The Upanishads" as well as his translations of these works, Surendranath Dasgupta's "History of Indian Philosophy," Sukumari Bhattacharji's "The Indian Theogony," Ralph T. H. Griffith's translation of the R̥g Veda, Dr. J. A. B. van Buitenen's translation of Rāmānuja's commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, as well as the recently published first volume of his translation of the Mahābhārata (University of Chicago Press) and countless works on Hindu religion and philosophy that I have read in the past, along with such

useful staples of Sanskrit study as Whitney's Sanskrit Grammar, the Oxford Sanskrit Dictionary edited by Monier-Williams, and the abridged version of Böhrtlingk and Roth's St. Petersburg Lexicon.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. J. A. B. van Buitenen, of the University of Chicago, who kindly offered to read the manuscript before publication, who made innumerable small corrections and many suggestions, nearly all of which I have followed, and who read the proofs. I would also like to express belated gratitude to the late Sarat Lahiri, a Bihari Brāhman, resident in New York, from whom I learned my first Sanskrit many years ago. I am also grateful to Alice Morris for much patient copying and to my old friend Louis Biancolli for encouragement.

As to my own qualifications, though I am known primarily as a magazine writer and music critic, my interest in the Sanskrit language has been of long duration, and I have spent a considerable amount of time in India as a journalist. As a Sanskrit scholar I am largely self taught, but am certainly competent for the task in hand. Moreover, the present translation has been read and approved by the highest authority. I have been acquainted for many years with the Bhagavad Gītā in translation, and have found many translations somewhat unsatisfactory because of deviations in meaning, and because few of them give any idea of the poem's structure, either metrical or grammatic. My aim has been to fill the gap by relating each word to the original, giving a grammatical commentary and a vocabulary from which various alternative meanings for each word may be picked – thus making it possible for the reader to make his own translation if he disagrees with mine. In the case of stanzas which are not entirely clear in translation, I have appended explanatory footnotes, many of them quoted from the commentary of Rāmānuja, the great eleventh-century south Indian religious philosopher, as translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, Patna, Varanasi, 1968. I have translated the poem afresh, and I know many parts of it by heart in the original language. The work has been a labor of love. If it in any way clarifies the poem to the reader, or interests him in the language in which it was originally written, my aim will have been realized. In a project as complex as this one, a few errors are apt to occur, and for these I ask the reader's indulgence.

Winthrop Sargeant

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

Sanskrit is a euphonious and very elegant language which has been spoken by upper-caste Indians, and the Vedic Aryans before them, for a longer time than any other known tongue. It is one of the ancient Indo-European languages, with many cognates in ancient Greek and Latin as well as in practically every modern major European language except Finnish and Hungarian. It is safe to say that it was spoken before 1,600 B.C. by the Aryans, and it is still spoken by a minority of brāhmins today. It also appears continually in modern India, in proper names, names of institutions and regions, and so on; and several modern Indian languages, including Hindi and Bengali, are derived from it. It has also influenced several languages of southeast Asia including that of Indonesia. There is, to be sure, considerable difference between Vedic Sanskrit (circa 1400–300 B.C.) and the Sanskrit of later times, but this difference is not as great as is sometimes supposed. The later language tends to join prefixes to the words they modify, whereas in Vedic they are usually separated. Also, an important feature of the Vedic language was the use of aorist forms which tend to disappear in the later language. There is also, as might be expected, considerable difference in vocabulary. Epic-Purāṇic Sanskrit succeeded the earlier Vedic language somewhere around 500 B.C., and was itself succeeded by so-called Classical Sanskrit during the Gupta Empire and the later Princely States (circa 400–1500 A.D.). Classical Sanskrit differs from Epic-Purāṇic mainly in the increased use of long compound words. The written, as opposed to the spoken language dates only from about 300 B.C., and even then very little was written down. Indians have always prided themselves on their memories, which have indeed been phenomenal when one considers that the whole literature of the Vedas, the Epics, the Upanishads, the Purāṇas, and much other material has been handed down by word of mouth. The bulk of Sanskrit literature was not written down until well into the Christian era. Even today there are some brāhmins who look down upon the printed word as a method of preserving the literature, and there exists in India a tremendously complicated method of mnemonics by which lengthy items of literature can be memorized. It is interesting to note that, owing to the detailed researches of Paṇini (350–250 B.C.?) and other great Hindu grammarians – researches that were not only linguistic but also concerned lingual and laryngeal anatomy – Sanskrit is the only ancient language the exact pronunciation of which is known today.

The Bhagavad Gītā is conceived in Epic-Purāṇic Sanskrit, the language of the Epics, Purāṇas and Upanishads, and it was probably first written down in the early centuries of the Christian era though like many other works which are embodied in written form, it undoubtedly dates from an earlier word-of-mouth version. Epic-Purāṇic Sanskrit is in many ways the simplest form of the language. An occasional aorist remains (there are eight or ten of them in the Bhagavad Gītā) and there is an occasional use of the prohibitive “mā” in place of the “na”

("not") of Classical Sanskrit. But the long compounds of Classical Sanskrit have not yet appeared. The Bhagavad Gītā, in its written form at any rate, is generally thought to date from the second or third century A.D., being considered a later interpolation in the long Epic, the Mahābhārata, most of which describes an India of an earlier period, possibly 800 B.C.

Sanskrit being one of the Indo-European group of languages, its general formation resembles that of Ancient Greek and Latin, being slightly more complex than that of the former and much more complex than that of the latter. Its verbal forms are derived from roots which also give birth to nouns and adjectives. Certain Sanskrit participial forms, such as the present participle in "ant" can still be found in French (German "end," English "ing"). The past passive participle ending "ta" survives in modern Italian, and there are fascinating resemblances among the personal pronouns to the "we" (*vayam*), "you" (*yūyam*) and "us" (*asmān*) of modern English, as well as prominent cognates to German such as the verb \sqrt{vrt} which is close to "werden," and means "to exist," or "to become" among other things. There is also a marked similarity of the Sanskrit verbs $\sqrt{bhū}$ and \sqrt{as} , both of which mean "be," and "is." Sanskrit verbs have a first person, second person and third person (singular and plural) similar in construction to Latin, with elements of the same *m* (*o*); *s*, *t*, *mas* (*mus*), *tas* (*tus*), *nt* endings that go with these persons in Latin. Sanskrit, however, has a dual form for both verbs and nouns (we two, you two, they two), and its verbs have two distinct conjugation systems, the active, or *parasmāipada*, and the middle, or *ātmanepada*, the former having our normal active meaning and the latter sometimes, but not always, having a more passive or reflexive character. In the simpler areas of conjugation the *parasmāipada* forms end in *i* and the *ātmanepada* forms in *e*.

Nouns in Sanskrit are declined as they are in Latin, except that Sanskrit has one more case. The cases in Sanskrit are as follows:

Nominative, used for the subject of a sentence.

Accusative, used for the direct object and also in the dative sense of "to."

Instrumental, used where English would use "by," "with," or "by means of."

Dative, used in the sense of "for," "to," or "toward."

Ablative, used in the senses of "of" and "from."

Genitive, used for the most part in the same sense of "of" as the ablative (in many words the ablative and genitive are identical).

Locative, used in the senses of "in" or "on," or occasionally "to," "toward," or "among."

Vocative, used as in Latin in direct address ("O Vishnu," etc.).

There are three genders of nouns and adjectives – masculine, feminine and neuter.

In the vocabularies of the following translation, the abbreviations nom., acc., inst., abl., gen., loc., and voc. are used to designate the above described cases, and sg. and pl. are used for singular and plural. In the matter of verbs, the root is given with the preceding sign $\sqrt{\quad}$, and 1st sg., 2nd sg., etc., mean first person singular, second person singular and so on. Participial forms are indicated. The

gerund form ending in “ya” or “tvā” is very common, having the approximate meaning of the English present participle in “ing,” or of “having done,” “having seen,” etc. There is a gerundive form in “ya” indicating future action, “to be done,” “to be known,” etc. The infinitive ending in “tum” is standard in the Epic-Purāṇic language, and the perfect active participle in “tavant” or “navant” is common. There are some special verbal forms – the passive, intensive, desiderative and causative – whose applications are obvious and which are noted in the vocabularies. There are also the standard tenses for verbs – indicative, subjunctive (which does not appear in the Bhagavad Gītā except in its aorist form), the optative (usually conveying the meaning “should”), the imperative, imperfect, perfect, aorist (rare) and future; also a periphrastic future in which the nominative singular of a noun or of a *nomen agentis* type noun ending in *tr* combined with the verb $\sqrt{ās}$, “be,” and a periphrastic perfect in which the perfect forms of the verbs \sqrt{as} and \sqrt{kr} (sometimes $\sqrt{bhū}$) are used as suffixes of an accusative derivative noun stem in *ām*. For further information, I recommend any standard Sanskrit grammar. I have used Whitney’s Sanskrit Grammar (Harvard University Press; also Oxford University Press), a pioneer work which is still standard.

The Sanskrit alphabet is as follows:

अ	a,	pronounced as in but.
आ	ā,	„ „ „ father.
इ	i,	„ „ „ lily <i>or</i> it.
ई	ī,	„ „ „ police.
उ	u,	„ „ „ push, full.
ऊ	ū,	„ „ „ prude <i>or</i> crude.
ऋ	ṛ,	„ as a slightly trilled vowel r, having the sound of ir in “birth” or ur in “purpose.” N.B. There is a long tradition involving the pronunciation ri for this vowel, and it is recommended by Monier-Williams on grounds of euphony. It is used by many Indians, and it survives in the ri of Sanskrit (<i>Samskr̥ta</i>). But the ri pronunciation has been abandoned by most present-day Sanskrit scholars in favor of a simple vowel ṛ such as appears in many Slavonic languages.
ॠ	ṝ,	the same pronunciation, more prolonged.
ऌ	ḷ,	pronounced by many Indians and the English as “lry” (as in revelry), but probably originally a pure l vowel as in the “le” of “simple” (see Whitney 24). There is, theoretically, also a long ḹ vowel but it is practically never used.
ए	e,	pronounced as in bet or tempo.
ऐ	āi,	„ „ „ aisle.
ओ	o,	„ „ „ stone or pole.
औ	āu,	„ „ „ German “Haus.”

क्	k,	,,	,,	kill or meek.
ख्	kh,	,,	,,	inkhorn or bunkhouse.
ग्	g,	,,	,,	go, get or dog.
घ्	gh,	,,	,,	loghouse.
ङ्	ñ,	,,	,,	sing or kink.
च्	c,	pronounced ch as in church.		
छ्	ch,	pronounced chh as in <i>birch hill</i> .		
ज्	j,	pronounced as in judge or jump.		
झ्	jh,	,,	,,	hedgehog (<i>hejhog</i>).
ञ्	ñ,	,,	,,	French <i>bon</i> , or as in hinge (<i>hinge</i>).
ट्	t,	,,	,,	true.
ठ्	th,	,,	,,	<i>anthill</i> .
ड्	d,	,,	,,	drum.
ढ्	dh,	,,	,,	<i>redhead</i> .
ण्	ṇ,	,,	,,	none.
त्	t,	,,	,,	tone or tub.
थ्	th,	,,	,,	<i>nuthatch</i> .
द्	d,	,,	,,	dot (slightly toward the th sound).
ध्	dh,	,,	,,	<i>adhere</i> .
न्	n,	,,	,,	nut or thin.
प्	p,	,,	,,	pot or hip.
फ्	ph,	,,	,,	<i>uphill</i> or <i>shepherd</i> .
ब्	b,	,,	,,	beer or rub.
भ्	bh,	,,	,,	<i>abhor</i> .
म्	m,	,,	,,	man or ham.
य्	y,	,,	,,	young or royal.
र्	r,	,,	,,	red or shear.
ल्	l,	,,	,,	law or lead.
व्	v,	,,	,,	like w in twine or wind.
श्	ś,	,,	,,	as in sure.
ष्	ṣ,	,,	,,	shut or bush.
स्	s,	,,	,,	sin or hiss.
ह्	h,	,,	,,	hero or hit.

When attached to consonants, vowel marks are as follows: ˘ above the line = e (as in ते te). ˆ above the line = āi (as in रै rāi). ˙ indicates o at the middle or end of a word (as in को ko). ˚ indicates āu at the middle or end of a word (as in तौ tāu). ˘ below the line indicates u (as in तु tu). ˙ below the line indicates ū (as in भू bhū). ˆ above the line indicates a consonant r (as in मर्त marta). Below the line it indicates a vowel r̄ (as in भृत् bhṛt). The short i at the middle or end

of a word is indicated by a tie to the left (as in धृति dhṛti). The long ī is indicated by a similar tie to the right (as in भी bhī). Long ā is indicated by an extra down-stroke 𑀅 (as in आत्मन् ātman). Otherwise every consonant is assumed to be followed by a short a. Most combined consonants are self explanatory, except for क्ष kṣa, श्च śca, ज्ञ jña, क्त kta and त्र tra (the diagonal stroke within the letter always indicates a consonant r). The *visarga* (“:” written at the end of a word in place of s or r, and transliterated as ḥ) is pronounced like the English aspirate h, but in Hindu usage it is followed by a short echo of the preceding vowel. The *anusvāra* (ṁ or ṇ) is a nasal sound like n in French “bon.” A diagonal stroke to the right beneath a letter (ञ्, ढ् etc.) indicates that it is a final, and is not followed by an “a” as it otherwise would be.

Although accent in Sanskrit is supposed to be quantitative as it was in Ancient Greek, the practice for many centuries has been to use a stress accent somewhat milder than that used in English, meanwhile observing the difference between long and short syllables. (Theoretically at least, a long syllable is twice as long as a short syllable). This accent falls on the penultimate syllable, or, in the case of a word ending with two short syllables, on the antepenultimate, or, in the case of a word ending in three short syllables, on the fourth from the end. These rules apply only to Classical and Epic-Purāṇic Sanskrit. Vedic Sanskrit has a more complicated system of accentuation. A long syllable is one containing a long vowel, a diphthong, or followed by more than one consonant. All others are short.

There remains the complicated subject of *saṁdhi*, or the laws of euphonic combination, which are to be found at work in virtually every phrase of Sanskrit. The aim of these laws is to enhance the elegance of sound of the language. There are laws relating to internal (i.e. within a given word) euphonic combination, which I shall pass over, since their effects are to be found in the vocabularies. External *saṁdhi* is a much more noticeable and puzzling phenomenon. It occurs at the end of a word, and is determined by the beginning of the following word. The reader will probably notice it first in the peculiar behavior of *s* when it occurs at the end of a word. It may be converted into ś or ṣ or *r*, or : (visarga), or, in the case of final *as* into o, or, what is perhaps still more common, it may disappear altogether. Other letters behave somewhat similarly. Final *r* may also become : (visarga). Final *t* is interchangeable with *d*, and sometimes also even with *n*, *j*, *l*, *c* and several other letters, depending on the beginning of the following word. *i* and *y* are interchangeable, the latter being used before a vowel and losing its independence as a syllable. The same thing is true of *u* and *v*. *n* becomes ṇ under certain circumstances (e.g., when preceded in the same word by *s* or *r*, or when followed by more than one consonant) and ñ under others. Final *n* after a short vowel and before a succeeding vowel is doubled to *nn*. Vowels, as the above alphabet shows, come in short and in long (*ā, ī, ū, ṛ*) forms. The vowel *ḷ*, in practice, has only a short form. Diphthongs are *e*, *ai*, *o* and *au*. In euphonic combination all types of *a* (long or short) combine to make *ā*, and all forms of *i* combine to make *ī*; all forms of *u* combine to make *ū*. *a* or *ā* combines with vowel *r* to form *ar*. *a* or *ā* combine with *i* or *ī* to form *e*, *a* or *ā* combine with *u* or *ū* to form *o*, *a* or *ā* combine with *e* to form *ai*, and *a* or *ā* combine with *o* to form

āu. An initial *a* after a final *e* or *o* is dropped and an apostrophe or *avagraha* is put in its place. Before a vowel *āu* becomes *āv*, *e* becomes *a* and *āi* becomes *ā*. And so on. For all the circumstances under which these changes and others occur, there is no recourse but a careful study of the subject as presented in Whitney's or some other grammar.

While most if not all the above changes will be found written out in the text, the *anusvāra* (*m̐* or occasionally *n̐*) is not always as easy to detect. It is very common, and its accurate rendering is vital to the proper pronunciation of Sanskrit. In the Sanskrit text it is indicated merely by a dot above the line. Its commonest occurrence is as a substitute for final *m* before a word beginning with a consonant or semivowel such as *y*, *h* or *v*. In transliteration it is written *m̐*, or sometimes *n̐*. Its pronunciation, as has been said, is approximately like the *n* in French "bon", thus a fairly indeterminate nasal sound with no closure either of the mouth or of the palate. It occurs also in such words and names as "saṁdhi," "Saṁjaya," "Jārāsandha," etc. Proper pronunciation makes the transition to the following consonant as smooth as can be imagined. In other texts, especially where internal *saṁdhi* is concerned, the dot, in transliteration is often placed below the *m̐* instead of above it, as is the practice I have followed, mainly for the sake of uniformity.

The metre of most of the stanzas of the Bhagavad Gītā is what is known as *śloka* metre, consisting of four lines of eight syllables each, and can be conveniently remembered by the English reader as the metre of Longfellow's "Hiawatha" (e.g. "by the shores of Gitchee Gumee" etc.). The verse is blank, i.e. there are no rhymes. There are, however, a number of stanzas, particularly at more dramatic moments, in which the *triṣṭubh* metre, consisting of four lines of eleven syllables each, is used. The *śloka* is the all-purpose metre of the Epics as well as much popular poetry. The *triṣṭubh* metre originated as the commonest metre of the Vedas, and is supposed to convey a warlike or powerful impression.

Regarding the page by page vocabularies in this edition, it might be remarked that Sanskrit is a very ambiguous language in which a single word may have scores of meanings, sometimes contradictory ones. Thus the common verb *√dhā*, according to Monier-Williams' dictionary, can mean put, place, take, bring, remove, direct, fix upon, resolve upon, destine for, bestow on, present, impart, appoint, establish, constitute, make, generate, produce, create, cause, effect, perform, execute, seize, take hold of, bear, support, wear, put on, accept, obtain, conceive, get, assume, have, possess, show, exhibit, incur, undergo, etc. In the vocabulary attached to each stanza I have included only the meanings that are close to the ones intended in the poem.

A concluding word about the transliteration and the literal English translation: as far as is possible I have placed the transliterated word, as well as the translated one, directly beneath its Sanskrit equivalent. I have taken the liberty, however, of introducing definite and indefinite articles (the former rarely used and the latter non-existent in Sanskrit) in order to make the meaning clearer. I have also placed the word "and" (Sanskrit "ca") before the last of the words it connects, instead of after a couple, or group, of connected words as is the Sanskrit usage (similar to the use of "que" in Latin).

THE SETTING OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

The Mahābhārata, one of the two great Hindu epics (the other is the Rāmāyaṇa), and the one in which the Bhagavad Gītā appears at a climactic moment, is a creation of tremendous length. It has been estimated to be seven times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together, or nearly three times as long as the Judaeo-Christian Bible. It is also a somewhat rambling work, containing many interpolated stories and moral treatises, and it is very Indian in its treatment of time, swinging backward and forward and not always sticking to a consistent chronology. What I have abstracted from it here, with the help of secondary sources, is merely a thin genealogical thread which leads up to the famous Battle of Kurukṣetra, along with a very much condensed narrative of that battle and its aftermath. The heroes of the battle, known as the Pāṇḍava Princes, are Arjuna (whose colloquy with the god Krishna forms the substance of the Bhagavad Gītā) and his half-brothers Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Nakula and Sahadeva. The villains are the hundred Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, their cousins, otherwise known as the Kāurava (Sons of Kuru) Princes. The mythological ancestry and relationships between all these characters are complex, and the following condensation attempts to describe them. The battle itself is a tragic episode in which nearly all the kṣatriya, or warrior, race is destroyed, the villains being killed and the heroes, when not slain, dying on a long pilgrimage, eventually attaining heaven. The one exception, King Yudhiṣṭhira, reaches heaven by a more roundabout route.

Unlike the Hebrew and Christian conceptions of creation, the Indian allows for the infinity of time, and regards the universe as one of many that stretch, in cycles of creation and destruction, into the endless past, and that will stretch, in similar cycles, into the endless future. The mythology pertaining to this particular universe concerns a primæval darkness, when all was water, until the eternal First Cause formed the *Hiranya-garbha*, the “golden foetus” or “golden egg,” which floated on the cosmic waters, and, in later myth, became identified with the creator god Brahmā. The egg divided itself into two parts, one becoming the heavens, the other the earth.

Now, Brahmā, the creator god, had a spiritual son (a product of Brahmā’s thumb, according to some sources) named Marīci, and Marīci’s son in turn became the tremendously prolific sage-king Kaśyapa, sometimes referred to as Prajāpati, or “the Lord of Creatures.” Kaśyapa married the twelve daughters of Dakṣa (who is also sometimes referred to as Prajāpati). Dakṣa was the son of Pracetas, an earlier being. It is perhaps significant that these early names are personifications, though names as personifications are common throughout the epic. Brahmā is thought to derive from the root $\sqrt{bṛh}$ which means “grow” or “evolve.” Dakṣa means “intelligence” or “mastery.” (It is cognate with the English “dextrous” and its etymological ancestors.) And Pracetas means “clever” or “wise.” In any case, Kaśyapa impregnated the daughters of Dakṣa, and they gave birth to the gods, demons, animals and many other types of being. One of

these daughters, named Dākṣāyaṇī, or Savarnā, gave birth to the sun god, Vivasvat (which means “shining forth”). The extraordinary scope of the Hindu imagination is illustrated by the fact that the great Indian commentator Rāmānuja, who lived in the eleventh century A.D., placed the date of Vivasvat’s birth at twenty-eight mahāyugas (about 120 billion years) before his own time, a figure that is perhaps closer to modern scientific theories of the birth of the sun than the chronologically vague account in Genesis would place it.

Vivasvat, who is mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā (IV, 1), became the father of Manu Vāivasvata (also mentioned in IV, 1), the Noah of Hindu mythology, who survived a great flood with the assistance of Vishnu (Vishnu had assumed the form of a fish for the purpose according to the Purāṇas). So ancient are the theoretical origins of this mythology that Manu Vāivasvata was merely the seventh in a long list of Manus belonging to previous universes. He became, after the flood, the progenitor of the human race. This he accomplished by holding a sacrifice during which a woman named Ilā was created. With Ilā’s help he begot nine sons, among whom was Ikṣvāku (likewise mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā, IV, 1), progenitor of the Solar Race to which the sage-king Janaka (mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā, III, 20) belonged. Other early members of the Solar Race were King Sagara of Ayodhyā, Raghu Rāma, grandfather of Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, and Sudyumna, another son of Manu Vāivasvata, who became the progenitor of the Lunar Race with which we are concerned here.

Among the descendants of Sudyumna was one Purūravas who married an *apsarā*, or water nymph, named Urvaśī, and begot three sons – Āyu, whose descendants founded the Kāśī line of kings to which some of the warriors at the Battle of Kurukṣetra belonged; Amāvasu, with whom we need not be concerned here, and Nahuṣa, father of the great King Yayāti Nāhuṣa. Yayāti practically peopled the whole subcontinent of India, as well as some territory north of the Himālaya, doing for India what his ancestor Manu Vāivasvata had done for the known world. Yayāti had two wives, Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā. By the former he begot Yadu, who became the progenitor of the Yādava and Vṛṣṇi clans from which Krishna was descended. By the latter he begot Pūru, the ancestor of Bharata, progenitor of both the Pāṇḍava and Kāurava lines, from which most of the heroes of the Battle of Kurukṣetra were descended. (It is interesting to note that apparently the Pūru, or Pāurava family continued under its own name down to the time of Alexander’s invasion of India, when a great king named “Poros” by the Greeks, was defeated in a memorable battle by Alexander, and later became his friend.) Among the early descendants of Bharata was King Hastin who founded the city of Hāstinapura where the Pāṇḍava and Kāurava princes were brought up. Among Hastin’s descendants was one Saṁvaraṇa who married Tapatī, a daughter of the Sun god by Chāyā (which means “shade”), and they begot Kuru. At this point the Kāuravas (Sons of Kuru) and the Pāṇḍavas (Sons of Pāṇḍu) are not yet differentiated, and this is a bit confusing because the Pāṇḍavas were as much “sons of Kuru” as the Kāuravas were. Some way further down the genealogical line we meet Prince Pratīpa, who was a descendant of Bharata and Kuru, and here we are closer to the immediate ancestry of our

principal characters. Prince Pratīpa was the father of King Śaṁtanu, who, in turn, was the father of the great warrior Bhīṣma, known in the Mahābhārata as “the Grandsire,” actually an uncle of Pāṇḍu, and the great uncle, and teacher in the art of arms, of the Pāṇḍava Princes, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, as well as the villainous Duryodhana and the remaining ninety-nine sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. In the great battle the Pāṇḍava Princes are arrayed against their beloved teacher Bhīṣma, a circumstance which is one of the causes of Arjuna’s agony of indecision at the beginning of the Bhagavad Gītā.

It is one of the universal rules of mythology that great heroes always have mysterious or divine births. Bhīṣma was the son of King Śaṁtanu by Gaṅgā, otherwise known as the River Ganges. By another wife, Satyawatī, Śaṁtanu begot Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya. Vyāsa (mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā, X, 13) was also a son of Satyawatī, but his birth was premarital. He was a son of the hermit Parāśara. The birth of Vyāsa as a son of Satyawatī is one of those odd features of Hindu literature that defy chronological sense. Vyāsa is supposed to have compiled the Vedas, the earliest of which date from about a thousand years previously, as well as the Mahābhārata, in which he appears as an important character. The word vyāsa means “divider,” “arranger” or “compiler.” Perhaps there were more than one of these, or perhaps, according to the Hindu theory of reincarnation, a Vyāsa was born whenever compiling was to be done. He appears in the Mahābhārata as a respected sage.

Now, Bhīṣma was a man of great nobility. When his father, King Śaṁtanu, approached him noting that he was an only son (this was long before the birth of Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya), and that if anything happened to him the line would become extinct, Bhīṣma went to the house of a fisherman, whose daughter Satyawatī, mentioned above, the aging king had met and admired, and asked Satyawatī’s father for her hand in marriage to *his* father. The fisherman agreed on one condition – that Satyawatī’s sons should inherit Śaṁtanu’s throne. Bhīṣma, Śaṁtanu’s first-born and proper heir, met this condition by renouncing the throne and vowing to remain childless throughout his life, thus permitting the sons of Satyawatī the royal succession. Not only did Bhīṣma make this sacrifice (continence was, and is, an admired trait in India), he went to the court of the King of the Kāśī and took part in a trial of arms, defeating all opponents and winning the daughters of that king, Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā, as wives for his half-brother Vicitravīrya, son of Satyawatī. On the death of Śaṁtanu, Vicitravīrya, who was still a minor, reigned at Hāstinapura, with Bhīṣma as regent. Such was the extraordinary generosity of Bhīṣma, and he became, during his lifetime, the greatest warrior in the world, as well as the greatest teacher of the art of arms. But after marrying Ambikā and Ambālikā, King Vicitravīrya proved to be childless (the story of what happened to Ambā, the other sister, who refused marriage, must await its place), and his half-brother Vyāsa, the sage, lay with his wives, according to the custom of levirate, to beget sons for him. Ambikā then became the mother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind and vacillating king of the Kāuravas, and Ambālikā became the mother of Pāṇḍu, who later became formally though not actually the father of the Pāṇḍava (or

Sons of Pāṇḍu) Princes. Thus it will be seen that the Pāṇḍavas and the Kāuravas (Descendants of Kuru) were, barring a few supernatural interventions and a remarkable amount of substitute fatherhood, cousins, and that while the Kāuravas were very distant descendants of Kuru, the Pāṇḍavas were also descended from Kuru through their official, if not actual, father Pāṇḍu.

But before we get to the reasons why Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva were not the real sons of Pāṇḍu, we must relate what happened to Am̐bā. At the time Bhīṣma won her as a bride for his half-brother Vicitravīrya, Am̐bā was in love with a certain Śālva, King of Sāubha and one of the royal personages who had participated in the trial of arms in which Bhīṣma had defeated all adversaries. Among others, he had defeated Śālva, and then spared his life. (Such trials of arms were held traditionally whenever a princess reached marriageable age. Sometimes the victor carried her off, as was the case with Bhīṣma. Sometimes the event was what was called a *svayamvara*, or “own choice,” at which the princess made her choice among the assembled warriors.) When Bhīṣma brought Am̐bā to Hāstinapura along with her sisters, Am̐bā refused to marry Vicitravīrya, and told those present that she had chosen Śālva as her future husband according to the rule of *svayamvara*. Bhīṣma obligingly sent her back to Śālva. But when she got there, Śālva, who felt humiliated by his defeat at the hands of Bhīṣma, refused to have anything to do with her. He sent her back to Bhīṣma, whom he felt had won her in honorable combat. Am̐bā, as might be expected, was rather upset. When she returned to Hāstinapura, things got even worse: Vicitravīrya refused to marry anyone whose heart was pledged to another. Am̐bā asked Bhīṣma to marry her, but this was out of the question because of Bhīṣma’s vow of chastity. Am̐bā became overwhelmed with hatred for Bhīṣma, who had been the author of all her misfortunes. She approached Śālva again, but he refused her a second time. Then she sought champions among the princes at Hāstinapura who might fight and kill Bhīṣma. But none of them would volunteer. They not only respected the old warrior, they were afraid of him. Then Am̐bā undertook austerities in order to gain the favor of the god Vishnu, and Vishnu gave her a garland, saying that whoever wore it would become an enemy of Bhīṣma. Am̐bā then approached King Drupada of the Pāñcālas, offering him the garland. But even Drupada, who was a mighty warrior, declined to fight with Bhīṣma. Finally, on the advice of some ascetics, she went to see Paraśurāma (“Rāma of the Axe”), a famous brāhman who had taken up the un-brahmanical profession of arms, and had vowed to exterminate the kṣatriya, or warrior, caste. Paraśurāma also became an *avatār* of the god Vishnu in honor of whom she had previously performed austerities. He agreed to be her champion. But when the battle took place Paraśurāma was defeated by Bhīṣma. This was the last straw for Am̐bā. She went to the Himālaya where she practiced extreme austerities to gain the favor of the god Shiva. Shiva appeared before her, and promised that she would, in her next incarnation, become a man. Impatient for her next birth, she built a great fire and plunged into it to be burned to death. She was subsequently reborn as Śikhaṇḍin, son of King Drupada. In due time, she, or he, became one of the warriors at the Battle of Kurukṣetra, and, as Arjuna’s charioteer, partici-

pated in the slaying of her old enemy Bhīṣma. In this combat Bhīṣma refused to defend himself against Śikhaṇḍin because he knew of his reincarnation and considered him to be a woman.

Now we come to the story of Pāṇḍu, officially the son of King Vicitravīrya but actually the son of Vicitravīrya's half brother Vyāsa by Ambālikā. Pāṇḍu was also a half brother of the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was the son of Vyāsa by Ambikā. Dhṛtarāṣṭra had a hundred sons. Pāṇḍu reigned at Hāstinapura with Bhīṣma as advisor. Pāṇḍu had two wives – Kuntī, daughter of Śūra, a Yādava king (who was also the father of Vasudeva, Krishna's father, thus making Kuntī Krishna's aunt), and Mādrī, another princess. Once, while out hunting, Pāṇḍu had the misfortune to kill a deer which was copulating with its mate and which was really a sage in disguise. While dying, the sage levelled a curse at Pāṇḍu. He would die the instant he had intercourse with a woman. Thus Pāṇḍu was incapable of having children, and the stage was set for the sort of divine, or otherwise peculiar births that are mandatory for great heroes. All of the so-called Sons of Pāṇḍu had gods for fathers.

Kuntī, who had been adopted in childhood by her father's childless cousin Kuntibhoja, and had taken her name from him (it had originally been Pṛthā) had once received a *mantra*, or magical invocation, from the sage Durvāsas with which she could summon any god to be the father of her children. As a matter of fact, or properly speaking, legend, she had used it once before her marriage to Pāṇḍu. She had summoned the Sun god, and by him had had a child named Karṇa who was born with earrings and a complete suit of armor. Kuntī had been so embarrassed by this illegitimate, though divine, birth (it was also a virgin birth), that she had set the child afloat in a river, where he was picked up by a charioteer named Adhiratha, and brought up by him as his son. Karṇa was unaware of his miraculous birth until the Battle of Kurukṣetra, and thought of himself as the son of a humble charioteer. Just before the battle, however, Kuntī informed him of his divine lineage. But this happened after Karṇa had cast his lot with the Kāuravas, and was preparing to fight against his half brothers, the Pāṇḍava Princes. Kuntī told her legal husband Pāṇḍu about the *mantra*, and promptly went about becoming the mother of great heroes by various gods. By Dharma, the god of righteousness, she became the mother of the just and honorable Yudhiṣṭhira. By Vāyu, the god of the winds, she begot the powerful Bhīma, whose habit was to uproot trees to use as weapons, and who had the appetite of a wolf. By Indra, the chief of the Vedic gods, she begot Arjuna, the stainless knight who is the hero of the Bhagavad Gītā. In the meantime, Pāṇḍu's other wife, Mādrī, was busy along similar lines. She became the mother of the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva by the twin Aśvins, the heavenly horsemen who pull the chariot of the dawn. Thus, all the Pāṇḍava Princes, as befits heroes, were of divine birth. As to Pāṇḍu, he died suddenly in a moment of forgetfulness while having intercourse with Mādrī. Mādrī dutifully committed suttee (or satī as the Sanskrit has it), burning herself upon her husband's funeral pyre.

Meanwhile, at the court of King Śūra, of the Yādava line, his grandson Krishna was born. There had already been intimations of his divine role as the *avatār* of

the god Vishnu. When his father, Vasudeva, was born there had been a rolling of heavenly drums because he was to become the parent of Vishnu's *avatār*. Vasudeva duly married Devakī, a niece of King Ugrasena of Mathurā. There were difficulties. Devakī's cousin, an evil tyrant named Kāṁsa who had imprisoned King Ugrasena and usurped the throne, arranged that all Devakī's children should die at birth (a sage had predicted that Kāṁsa would be slain by a son of Devakī). Six children thus perished. But Vasudeva magically inserted the seventh into the womb of Rohinī, another of his wives, and the child who was born was Balarāma, Krishna's older brother. Krishna himself was placed by Vasudeva into the hands of a cowherd named Nanda. Krishna was brought up by Nanda and his wife among cowherds and milkmaids. He was a sly child, and delighted in stealing milk, butter and fruit. But he also performed several heroic feats as a child. And he pursued the opposite sex, accumulating, according to some sources, as many as 16,108 wives including his chief wife Rukminī. The evil Kāṁsa continued to try to waylay Krishna and his brother Balarāma, seeking their death, but was always foiled by one stratagem or another. Finally, Kāṁsa invited Krishna and Balarāma to take part in an athletic contest in which he sent savage demons and wild beasts to fight them. Among these was Keśin, king of the savage horse-demons, whose death at Krishna's hands earned Krishna the epithet of Keśinisūdana (Slayer of Keśin) by which, among other nicknames, he is addressed in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The demons and beasts being easily overcome by Krishna and Balarāma, Kāṁsa himself entered the arena and was killed, in fulfillment of the sage's prophecy, by Krishna. Kāṁsa's brother Sunāman then tried to avenge Kāṁsa's death, but was slain by Balarāma. The result was that the imprisoned King Ugrasena was freed and reigned again in his kingdom at Mathurā. Shortly afterward, Krishna descended into hell to bring back his six brothers whom Kāṁsa had caused to be slain at birth. The six then ascended to heaven with Krishna's help. Then Krishna changed his habits, left the milkmaids behind, underwent purification ceremonies and acknowledged Vasudeva and Devakī as his true parents. Along with his brother Balarāma, he received spiritual instruction, and instruction in the art of war, from Sāṁdīpani, a famous warrior-sage. During this period, Pāṇcajanya, a marine demon who lived at the bottom of the sea in the form of a conch, kidnapped Sāṁdīpani's son. Krishna went to the rescue and slew Pāṇcajanya, and thereafter used the conch shell Pāṇcajanya (mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gītā* I, 15) as a trumpet.

Jarāsaṁdha, King of Māgadha, whose daughters had married Kāṁsa, heard of Kāṁsa's death at the hands of Krishna, and sent a great army against Mathurā, attacking the city eighteen times without decisive result. A "barbarian" (Greek) king named Kālayavana, "Black Greek" (Yavana, "Ionian," was the Indian term for Greeks, many of whom had settled in India at this time), joined his armies to Jarāsaṁdha's, and finally Krishna was forced to abandon the city. He moved his capital to a town in the Gujarat called Dvārakā ("the city of gates or doors") which then became one of India's sacred cities. Krishna's later exploits included battles with, and defeats of, the gods Indra, Varuṇa and Shiva, the conquest of a large number of tribes and kings, the abduction of a Gandhāra

princess from her *svayamvara* and the defeat of the King of Niṣāda who had attacked Dvārakā. He became India's ideal of manhood and a god who is worshipped to this day.

Pāṇḍu and his half brother Dhṛtarāṣṭra seem to have divided the throne at Hāstinapura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, disqualified because of his blindness, acting as regent until the death of Pāṇḍu, who, as has been said, died because of the sage's curse (he had by the time of his death taken up residence in the forest with his wives and children). Kuntī, his chief wife, remained to take care of the children while Mādri, as has been related, committed suttee. The sages of the forest took Kuntī and the children back to Hāstinapura, entrusting them to the old warrior Bhīṣma. The children (the Pāṇḍava Princes Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) grew up together with the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (the Kāurava princes) in typical boyish rivalry and general high spirits. But Bhīma was something of a bully. Much more powerfully built than the others, he delighted in grasping the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra with his arms and holding them under water until their breaths gave out, and when they climbed trees he would shake the trunks until they fell out like ripe fruit. The Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra hated Bhīma from infancy. Chief among them was Duryodhana ("Dirty Fighter"), and he became an early enemy of the Pāṇḍava Princes, partly because of Bhīma's bullying but also because he was afraid that Pāṇḍu's eldest son, Yudhiṣṭhira, might succeed to the throne instead of himself. Duryodhana hatched a plot to wipe out the Sons of Pāṇḍu. He poisoned Bhīma's food, bound him, and threw him into a river to drown, and he planned to cast Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira into prison, and seize the throne himself. But the poison only strengthened Bhīma, who burst his bonds and swam to shore. Meanwhile the sons of Pāṇḍu and the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra were taught the arts of war by the older warriors Kṛpa, Droṇa and "the grandsire" Bhīṣma. It was Arjuna who grew up to be the most skillful warrior, while Bhīma, because of his superhuman strength, became the most powerful one.

During this time, the unacknowledged half-brother of the Pāṇḍava Princes, Karṇa, who had been born to Kuntī by the Sun god but had been brought up as the son of a humble charioteer, appeared at Hāstinapura. He challenged Arjuna to combat, much to the delight of Duryodhana. It is said that the father of both heroes, the god Indra and the Sun god, appeared in the sky to encourage their offspring. But there was some question as to whether Karṇa, allegedly the son of a charioteer, was of sufficient rank to fight with Arjuna, and the fight was called off. Duryodhana thereupon crowned Karṇa King of Aṅga, a kingdom some authorities identify with modern Bengal. But the encounter did not follow immediately, for Duryodhana carried Karṇa off in his chariot. Knowing that such an encounter was inevitable at some point, the god Indra, father of Arjuna, sought to weaken Karṇa. He appeared to Karṇa in the guise of a brāhman and begged from him his earrings and armor. Karṇa, who was famous for his generosity, gave them up, and Indra, astonished by this act, granted Karṇa in return the use of the Śakti, a magical weapon which was Indra's own and which had the power to kill even at a great distance. But Indra made a proviso. The

weapon could be used by Karna only once, after which it would return to its godly owner. Karna went to the warlike brāhman Paraśurāma (“Rāma of the Axe”) who hated all members of the kṣatriya, or warrior, caste. He represented himself to Paraśurāma as a brāhman, and Paraśurāma taught him the proper *mantra*, or magical invocation, to use with the Śakti. But one day while Karna slept, a stinging insect burrowed into his thigh, inflicting a painful and bloody wound. Karna bore the pain without flinching. Paraśurāma then knew immediately that Karna was not the brāhman he represented himself to be. Only a kṣatriya, or member of the warrior caste, could stand such pain without crying out. Karna had to confess that he was a kṣatriya, and Paraśurāma, outraged by the deception, pronounced a curse on Karna – he would be doomed to forget the *mantra* at the moment he needed it most. And so it turned out. But we are getting ahead of our story.

In the forest hermitage of the sage Bharadvāja, his own son, the great hero Droṇa was trained in archery along with Drupada, son of the king of the Pāñcālas. As has been said, mythology demands that all heroes be born in a peculiar manner, and the births of Droṇa and Drupada were peculiar indeed, for neither had a mother. Droṇa, whose name means “bucket,” was born from a bucket into which his father’s seed had fallen. Something similar had happened to Pṛṣata, the king of Pāñcāla. He was observing a beautiful nymph, named Menakā when his seed fell to the ground. Ashamed, he took a rapid (dru) step (pada) to stamp out the seed. But he did not succeed, and Drupada was born from it. Droṇa was a brāhman, but despite his birth became a renowned warrior. Drupada was a kṣatriya. During their childhood Drupada often spoke of giving half his kingdom to Droṇa. But when King Pṛṣata died and Drupada ascended the throne of Pāñcāla, he spurned his former friend, calling him a poor beggar. Droṇa, however, was selected by “the grandsire” Bhīṣma to train the five Sons of Pāṇḍu as well as the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the arts of war. After their apprenticeship was over, Droṇa sent the Sons of Pāṇḍu on an expedition to defeat and capture Drupada. They defeated the Pāñcālas and took Drupada prisoner. Droṇa then forgave Drupada, but retained, as a pledge of future friendship, half the Pāñcāla kingdom, thus gaining by force what he had been promised and then denied. Drupada was angry, and hoped for a son who would slay Droṇa. He performed a great sacrifice to this end, in which, it is said, ten million cattle were killed. When the moment arrived, Drupada’s wife was unprepared to receive his seed. But a son and a daughter sprang forth miraculously from the sacrificial fire. These were the twins Dhṛṣṭadyumna (“He whose splendor is bold”) and Drāupadī (“Daughter of Drupada”), later the collective wife of the five Pāṇḍava Princes. Many years later, Dhṛṣṭadyumna did indeed slay Droṇa.

Duryodhana, the evil elder son of the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, became enraged at the popularity and success at arms of the Pāṇḍava Princes, and the possibility that Yudhiṣṭhira, instead of he, might succeed to the throne of Hāstinapura. With the connivance of Karna and Śakuni, the brother-in-law of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he plotted to destroy the Sons of Pāṇḍu. At first, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was inclined to kindness toward his nephews, the Sons of Pāṇḍu, would hear

nothing of the plot. Later, owing to the wiles and insistent arguments of Duryodhana, he agreed to it, and mentioned to the Sons of Pāṇḍu that a great festival in honor of Shiva was to take place in the nearby city of Vāraṇāvata, and that the Pāṇḍavas owed it to themselves to attend, because the people of Vāraṇāvata were anxious to see them. Before the festival took place, Duryodhana, Karṇa and Śakuni sent a minister named Purocana to Vāraṇāvata to construct a palace for the Sons of Pāṇḍu to stay in during their visit. By prearrangement this palace was built of wax and other inflammable materials. The idea was to set fire to the palace while the Sons of Pāṇḍu were asleep, and thus destroy them. But Vidura, a younger brother of Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who favored the Pāṇḍava Princes, warned Yudhiṣṭhira that something was afoot in Vāraṇāvata, and sent a miner to dig a subterranean exit from the wax palace. Pretending that they knew nothing of the plot, the Sons of Pāṇḍu took up residence in the palace, but kept a sharp lookout. At midnight the palace was set aflame, and the Sons of Pāṇḍu escaped through the subterranean tunnel. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons exchanged their garments for funereal ones and performed impressive obsequies near a river for the supposedly dead Pāṇḍava Princes. Only Vidura was not overcome by apparent grief; he knew that the Pāṇḍavas had escaped.

The Sons of Pāṇḍu journeyed into the forest, often carried with their mother Kuntī on the broad shoulders and hips, or with the hands, of the powerful Bhīma. During this journey they met their grandfather the sage Vyāsa, who gave them good counsel and advised them to dress as brāhmins. Finally they arrived at a city called Ekacakra (“One Wheel,” actually “the City of the One Wheel of Dominion”), whose king had fled, and which was being held in thrall by a terrible cannibalistic demon named Bakāsura (“Crane Demon”). A brāhman family gave them shelter, and when they learned about the demon and his insistence on tribute in the form of human flesh and other foods, Bhīma set out to destroy him. A terrific battle ensued in which the demon pulled up trees by the roots to belabor Bhīma with. But Bhīma, who was well aware of this tactic, finally threw him to the ground and broke his bones. He returned to the city, dragging the demon’s body to the city gates, took a bath and then told the brāhman family of his deed.

While the Sons of Pāṇḍu were sojourning at Ekacakra, they heard about the *svayamvara* of Princess Drāupadī, daughter of King Drupada (“Rapid Step”) of Pāñcāla who has already been mentioned in connection with his boyhood friend Droṇa. Drāupadī was a great beauty, and princes came from many distant kingdoms to compete for her hand. The Sons of Pāṇḍu were still disguised as humble brāhmins, and after a long march they arrived at Pāñcāla where they took up residence at the home of a potter. When the great day of the *svayamvara* arrived, even Krishna and his brother Balarāma had come to Pāñcāla to compete in the ceremony. King Drupada had caused a revolving ring to be placed on a pole at a great height, and had had a very large bow constructed which was difficult to bend. He who shot an arrow through the ring with this bow could claim Drāupadī as his wife. It would be a difficult feat, and the gods assembled in midair to witness the spectacle. One by one, the princes stepped up to try their skill. Some

could not even bend the bow, and none succeeded in hitting the target. Then Arjuna stepped forward, took up the bow and shot five arrows straight through the ring. Both King Drupada and Princess Drāupadī were overjoyed, though there were murmurs of objection from some who were present – including Karṇa and Śalya, King of Madra – that a brāhman should win a prize reserved for warriors (Arjuna was still disguised as a brāhman).

When the Pāṇḍava Princes returned home, they agreed that Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of them, should marry Drāupadī. But as they saw their mother, Kuntī, they cried out “We have won a great prize today,” and Kuntī said “Then share the prize between you.” Kuntī’s word being law, there was nothing to do but marry all five Sons of Pāṇḍu to Drāupadī. King Drupada objected to the marriage (polyandry was not a common practice among Hindus, though polygamy was), but he finally yielded. It was arranged that Drāupadī should stay two days at the house of each brother in turn, and that none of the others would see her during this time. She subsequently bore five sons, one by each of the brothers; Prativindhya by Yudhiṣṭhira, Sutasoma by Bhīma, Śrutakīrti by Arjuna, Śatānika by Nakula and Śrutakarman by Sahadeva. Arjuna was her favorite husband, and when he afterward married a second wife, Subhadrā, a sister of Krishna whom he had carried off by force with Krishna’s permission, Drāupadī was overcome with jealousy.*

Back in Hāstinapura, the capital of Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s kingdom, the Sons of Kuru heard of the doings at Pāñcāla and realized for the first time that the Sons of Pāṇḍu had not perished in the burning of the wax palace. Vidura was happy at this news. His brother, the vacillating, blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, was at first relieved to hear the news, but later connived with his sons against the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana, eldest of the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, was infuriated, and so was his brother Duḥśāsana. They consulted with their uncle Śakuni, plotting the downfall of the Pāṇḍavas all over again. They considered setting the sons of Kuntī (Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna) and the sons of Mādri (Nakula and Sahadeva) against each other. They considered bribing Drupada to join them against the Pāṇḍavas. They also considered fomenting jealousy among the Pāṇḍavas through experts in the art of erotics, and fomenting the jealousy of Drāupadī by catching the Pāṇḍavas *in flagrante delicto* with other women. By this time the Pāṇḍavas had been joined by Dhṛṣṭadyumna, son of Drupada, and also by Śikhaṇḍin, the male incarnation of Ambā, daughter of the King of the Kāśis, now a son of Drupada. In addition, they had been joined by Krishna and the Yādavas, Krishna’s tribe. This was a formidable group to contend with, and the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra were understandably fearful. The wise, aged and generous Bhīṣma counselled making peace with the Sons of Pāṇḍu and giving them half the kingdom. Droṇa agreed. The hotter-headed Duryodhana and Karṇa did not.

* There has been some speculation among historians as to the relative customs of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kāuravas. The Cambridge History of India holds that the polyandry of the Pāṇḍavas is an indication of their comparative primitiveness, that they were a northern tribe who went to war with the more civilized Kāuravas, and that the latter were an old settled people who preferred to gain their ends by guile and conspiracy rather than war – a point that seems to be borne out by the narrative.

But Vidura, their virtuous uncle, was sent to Drupada's court to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas and bring them back to Hāstinapura along with their mother and common wife. This being accomplished, the kingdom was divided in half, Yudhiṣṭhira was crowned king of the other half, and the Sons of Pāṇḍu took up residence in a new city (identified by some with modern Delhi). They named the city Indraprastha, and there they reigned justly for thirty-six years.

Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhira began to have dreams of empire, and sent for Krishna to advise him whether or not he might undertake the Rājasūya Sacrifice and name himself emperor. But Krishna pointed out that as long as his, Krishna's old enemy King Jarāsaṁdha, King of Magadha, reigned, held some eighty-six princes in prison, and planned to attack and imprison a full hundred, nobody else could proclaim himself emperor. Yudhiṣṭhira was inclined to give up his idea, but Bhīma did not like this spirit of complacency, which he thought unworthy of a king. Krishna proposed that he, Bhīma and Arjuna set out to kill Jarāsaṁdha and free his prisoners who would then become allies of the Pāṇḍavas. Arjuna was enthusiastic. The Sons of Pāṇḍu had too long refrained from heroic deeds. So they set out. Now, Jarāsaṁdha, like all the other warrior heroes in this epic, had had a strange birth. His father, one Bṛhadratha, had been childless, and had consulted a sage about his problem. At that moment a mango fell into the lap of the sage. The sage cut the mango into two halves and presented them to Bṛhadratha, who gave each half to one of his two wives. The result was that each wife gave birth to half a child, and that only on the intervention of a rākṣasī, or female demon named Jarā ("the Old One"), who tied the two halves together, was Jarāsaṁdha made into a complete human being (hence his name, "put together by Jarā"). He grew into a man of immense strength, and a very wicked one. When Krishna and the Pāṇḍava Princes arrived at Jarāsaṁdha's court, they were disguised as holy men, and Jarāsaṁdha welcomed them with courtesy. But soon they revealed themselves as warriors, and sought battle with him in single combat. Jarāsaṁdha chose Bhīma as his opponent, and they battled each other for thirteen days. On the thirteenth, Bhīma killed Jarāsaṁdha, the captive princes were released, Jarāsaṁdha's son was made king of Māgadha and Krishna and the Sons of Pāṇḍu returned to Indraprastha. Yudhiṣṭhira performed the Rājasūya Sacrifice, which was indispensable for one who sought imperial dominion, and proclaimed himself emperor. After the ceremony, however, the sage Vyāsa, his natural grandfather, who had been in attendance, cautioned Yudhiṣṭhira, and prophesied evil days to come for the kṣatriya race.

Duryodhana, who had also attended the ceremony, noted the prosperity that the Pāṇḍavas had brought to Indraprastha, and this inflamed his anger even further. He went to his uncle Śakuni with a proposal that the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra should declare war against the Sons of Pāṇḍu, and take back the half of the kingdom they had been given. But the wily and evil Śakuni proposed that, on the contrary, they should invite Yudhiṣṭhira to a game of dice. He, Śakuni, was skilled in the tricks of dice playing. Yudhiṣṭhira was not. Śakuni could accomplish by peaceful means what Duryodhana wanted to gain by war. King Dhṛtarāṣṭra was reluctant to approve this idea, but as usual he vacillated and finally

consented, causing a large hall of games to be built and sending his brother Vidura with an invitation to Yudhiṣṭhira. Vidura was not happy with his assignment, and he warned Yudhiṣṭhira that probably no good would come of the invitation. Nevertheless, partly out of courtesy, partly because he had a weakness for gambling, Yudhiṣṭhira accepted, and went with his retinue to Hāstinapura, where the Sons of Pāṇḍu were put up in regal fashion by the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Next morning, a cloth having been spread in the hall of games, the game began. Yudhiṣṭhira was quite aware of Śakuni's reputation as an expert at the game, but he plunged ahead. He wagered jewels and gold, then chariots and horses. Śakuni won every throw. Intoxicated by the game, Yudhiṣṭhira went on to wager cattle, sheep, villages, citizens and all their possessions. Śakuni won them all. Then, in desperation, the foolish Yudhiṣṭhira began to wager his brothers Nakula, Sahadeva and finally Arjuna, Bhīma and himself. Śakuni won them all, and then asked Yudhiṣṭhira to wager their common wife Drāupadī. (This was technically against the rules. It was bad form for one side to suggest to the other what he should wager.) The elders, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Bhīṣma and Vidura, and even King Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself were outraged by this suggestion, but the evil Duryodhana, Karṇa and the remaining Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra shouted in exultation. Śakuni won again, and Drāupadī was sent for, to become the household servant of the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Vidura was filled with forebodings. Duryodhana sent his brother Duḥśāsana to fetch Drāupadī. He caught her by the hair and dragged her before the assembly. The elders hung their heads in shame. Even Vikarṇa, one of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, protested that the game had been rigged and that, contrary to the rules, it was Śakuni who had suggested the wager of Drāupadī. But Duryodhana was adamant, and his brother Duḥśāsana even went to the extreme of stripping the clothes from the Pāṇḍavas, including Drāupadī. In Drāupadī's case, however, a miracle occurred. As her robes were stripped away, new ones appeared in their place, and Duḥśāsana, having piled up a great heap of elegant garments, was finally forced to cease, from fatigue. At this point Bhīma swore a mighty oath, that one day he would rend the breast of Duḥśāsana and drink his blood. The howling of animals was suddenly heard from the forest. King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, foreseeing the destruction of his race, called Drāupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira to his side, asked them for forgiveness and restored their kingdom to them. (There had been a legal dilemma not only over Śakuni's right to suggest the wager of Drāupadī, but also as to whether Yudhiṣṭhira, who had wagered and lost himself, any longer had the right to wager Drāupadī who, at that point, was no longer his property. One of the reasons Dhṛtarāṣṭra set the Sons of Pāṇḍu free was the dubious legality of this wager.)

But when the Pāṇḍava Princes had left, Duryodhana, seeing his plans frustrated, upbraided his father, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and complained that by his generous action he had strengthened their enemies again. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was a doting father, gave in to Duryodhana's arguments and agreed once more to a game of dice. Yudhiṣṭhira was again summoned, and the crafty Śakuni again took up the dice. This time the stake was that the defeated party go with his brothers into exile for thirteen years, spending the last of the thirteen incognito. If they

were recognized during the thirteenth year, they would agree to go into exile again for another twelve years. Needless to say, Yudhiṣṭhira lost again, and the Sons of Pāṇḍu took to the forest. Droṇa and Vidura were both apprehensive. They felt that, in retribution, the race of the Kāuravas (the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, along with Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself, Vidura and Śakuni) was doomed. But Duryodhana slapped his thighs in derision. Then Vidura pronounced a curse on Duryodhana to the effect that he would die, with both legs broken, on the battlefield at the hands of Bhīma if he proceeded with his evil plans. After that, Vidura left the court and cast his lot with the Sons of Pāṇḍu.

At this point, Krishna was busy lifting the siege of Dvārakā, which had been besieged in his absence by a certain King Śālva, whose friend, Śiśupāla, Krishna had slain. When he heard of the dice game at Hāstinapura he set out at once to find the Pāṇḍavas in the forest, and he brought along with him many men of the Bhoja and Vṛṣṇi tribes as well as Dhṛṣṭaketu, King of Cedi, and members of a warrior tribe known as the Kekayas who had been friends of the Pāṇḍavas. Krishna found the Pāṇḍavas, but stayed with them only long enough to express his sympathy, and then returned to Dvārakā with Subhadrā, the second wife of Arjuna, and their child Abhimanyu. As to Arjuna himself, he went on a pilgrimage to the Himālaya, where he practiced austerities. He was met by his father, the god Indra, who was disguised as a brāhman. Indra advised him to do penance to Shiva (a god who was rapidly displacing the old Vedic god Indra at this time). Arjuna did as he was told. But during his austerities he was charged by a wild boar. He shot it with an arrow, and another huntsman shot it at the same moment. This was Shiva himself, though Arjuna was unaware of the fact. Shiva suggested that they fight over the matter of who had killed the boar. Arjuna accepted, and the two battled. But Arjuna soon noticed that his opponent was unscathed while he himself was being wounded. Then he recognized Shiva, asked forgiveness, and Shiva healed his wounds, strengthening him a hundred-fold. He was then taken in a chariot to Indra's realm, rested for a while in the kingdom of the gods and obtained divine weapons.

While Arjuna was away, Krishna and Balarāma again visited the Pāṇḍavas, and several sages told them stories to take their minds off their misfortunes. But Drāupadī never gave up lamenting her humiliation at the hands of the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Drāupadī wanted revenge, and eventually she got it. Many things happened in the forest. A great army was collecting around the Pāṇḍavas, and was becoming a burden to support. They sent it away, telling those who were so inclined to go to the court of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and the others to the court of Drupada. The Pāṇḍavas then went on a pilgrimage, during which Bhīma stumbled upon his half brother Hanumān (also a son of the wind god Vāyu), who had taken a heroic role in the Rāmāyaṇa, the other great Hindu epic. The encounter brought joy to both brothers, and Hanumān recounted the adventures he had had while assisting Rāma to bring back his beloved Sītā from captivity at the hands of the King of Laṅkā (Ceylon). Meanwhile, against the advice of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Duryodhana and the Kāuravas went to the forest to gloat over the misery of the Pāṇḍavas. There, they attacked a group of gandharvas (heavenly musicians) and were de-

feated after a great battle. They were rescued by the just and noble Yudhiṣṭhira, with whom the gandharvas refused to fight, and the rescue humiliated Duryodhana, Karna and the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Miracles occurred, and adventures without number came the way of the Sons of Pāṇḍu. Arjuna returned from his pilgrimage. Finally, the thirteenth year of their exile arrived, and, in various disguises, they came to the court of Virāṭa, King of the Matsyas, where they took up domestic service. Yudhiṣṭhira became a courtier to the king; Bhīma served as a cook; Arjuna disguised himself as a eunuch to serve the ladies of the court; Nakula became a stable boy; Sahadeva became the king's cowherd, and Drāupadī became the attendant of the queen and the princesses of Virāṭa's court. But soon Drāupadī's beauty caught the eye of Kīcaka, the commander in chief of Virāṭa's armies, and he sought to seduce her. Her entreaties that she was merely a low-caste serving woman were of no avail. Kīcaka pursued her and tried to rape her. Careless of revealing the identities of the Sons of Pāṇḍu, she arranged for an assignation with Kīcaka, and persuaded Bhīma to go in her place. When Kīcaka appeared, Bhīma pounded him to a pulp, later going back to his kitchen, taking a bath and sleeping with satisfaction. Kīcaka's death made Drāupadī an object of fear at the court of King Virāṭa, and she was asked to leave. She requested one more month's stay (it was the last month of the thirteenth year of the exile of the Sons of Pāṇḍu, and they were obliged to preserve their incognito until it ended).

But rumors of the slaying of Kīcaka began to reach Hāstinapura, and, as everybody knew Kīcaka to be a man of great physical prowess, slayable only by the mighty Bhīma, a suspicion began to grow that the Pāṇḍavas were at Virāṭa's court. Duryodhana proposed invading Virāṭa's realm, and was enthusiastically supported by King Suśarman of Trigarta (which lay in the neighborhood of modern Lahore). Suśarman had long had an account to settle with Virāṭa, and now that the latter's chief of armies had been killed, he thought it a good time to strike. Karna agreed. Suśarman attacked the dominions of Virāṭa, laying waste the land. Virāṭa regretted the loss of his general, but Yudhiṣṭhira reassured him. Though he was a mere holy man, Yudhiṣṭhira said, he was also an expert in the art of war. If Virāṭa would permit him to arm the cook, the stable boy and the cowherd, they would protect him. These, of course, were Bhīma, Nakula and Sahadeva, and they set out, this time without Arjuna, to protect Virāṭa and defeat Suśarman and the Kāuravas. There was a big battle, and Virāṭa was taken captive for a time. Bhīma at one point wanted to uproot a tree to use as a weapon, but this was such a well-known habit of his that Yudhiṣṭhira cautioned him against it, lest the identity of the Pāṇḍava Princes be discovered. Bhīma took his place in a chariot, and the Pāṇḍavas threw back the armies of Suśarman, released Virāṭa and brought him back to his capital city, Matsya, in triumph. Meanwhile, Duryodhana had attacked Virāṭa's realm from the opposite side and was stealing the cattle that were part of Virāṭa's wealth. Virāṭa's son, Prince Uttara, was anxious to respond to this attack, and he had heard that Arjuna, though a eunuch (still disguised), had at one time been a charioteer. He asked Arjuna to serve him in this capacity, and the two of them went out alone to tackle the whole Kāurava army. It was Uttara's first battle, and when he saw the Kāuravas arrayed,

Arjuna was at some pains to keep him from fleeing the field. Finally, he made Uttara *his* charioteer, and, sending him to retrieve some weapons he had hidden in a tree, prepared for battle, sounding his conch horn Devadatta. Droṇa and Bhīṣma had already recognized him. But the period of thirteen years had expired. Droṇa advised the Kāuravas to let Duryodhana return to Hāstinapura with part of the army, and to leave another part to seize Virāṭa's cattle. Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpā, Aśvatthāman, son of Droṇa, and Karṇa would remain to give battle to Arjuna. But Arjuna pursued Duryodhana, and at the same time managed to put the cattle stealers to flight. Then he returned to fight with the Kāurava forces, defeating them all and finally using a magic weapon that made them fall down unconscious. He then stripped their clothes off, and they were forced to return to Hāstinapura in disgrace. Meanwhile, Arjuna sent word back to the court of Virāṭa, saying that the young Uttara had won a glorious victory. On the way back, he hid his arms in the tree again, and assumed his former effeminate garb as a eunuch.

When Virāṭa returned to his court after the victory over Suśarman, he noticed that his son, Uttara, was missing, but Uttara soon turned up. On being questioned, he gave all the credit for the victory to Arjuna, and the Pāṇḍava Princes immediately disclosed their true identity. No longer was it necessary for them to maintain their incognito. They left Virāṭa's capital and settled in the city of Upaplavya, another place in Virāṭa's realm. Here they summoned their friends and relatives. Krishna and Balarāma arrived with Arjuna's second wife Subhadrā and their son Abhimanyu, along with many Yādava warriors. Those who had briefly joined the Pāṇḍavas in the forest returned. The King of the Kāśis and Śāibya, King of the Śibis, arrived with their retinues. Drupada, King of the Pāñcālas, brought a considerable army, along with Śikhaṇḍin (the former Ambā) and his twin brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Sātyaki (otherwise known as Yuyudhāna, and a kinsman of Krishna) was present also. Led by Krishna, this mighty gathering of warriors thought of sending a last peace envoy to the Kāuravas. Balrāma was in favor of this move. But Sātyaki deplored the idea as unworthy of warriors, and Drupada agreed. A brāhman was nevertheless sent to Hāstinapura with proposals to Duryodhana for a peaceful settlement, the settlement being that the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra agree to return the lands they had taken from the Sons of Pāṇḍu. The aged Bhīṣma was in favor of the settlement, but Karṇa was for war. Krishna and Balarāma regarded themselves as neutrals, friendly to both sides. Duryodhana approached Krishna asking for his help in the coming battle. Krishna offered Duryodhana and Arjuna each a choice between himself, unarmed, and his army, the Nārāyaṇa tribesmen. Arjuna chose Krishna, and Duryodhana the army. Krishna agreed to serve as Arjuna's charioteer. Balarāma decided to abstain from the battle.

Meanwhile a tremendous mobilization took place on both sides. Śalya, King of Madra Deśa, marched toward the Pāṇḍavas with a huge army, intending to join them, but Duryodhana extended exaggerated hospitality toward him and his troops, and when Śalya asked how he could repay it, Duryodhana asked him to join the side of the Kāuravas, which he did. Śalya was an uncle of Nakula and

Sahadeva, and thus he cast his lot against them just to keep a promise. His sympathies, however, remained with the Pāṇḍavas, and he promised Yudhiṣṭhira that if he were to become Karṇa's charioteer when Karṇa attacked Arjuna, he would hamper Karṇa's efforts. Ultimately, at their headquarters in Upaplavya, in Virāṭa's kingdom, the Pāṇḍavas mobilized a force of seven divisions. The Kāuravas, at Hāstinapura, mobilized a much larger force of eleven divisions. Each division consisted of 21,870 chariots, an equal number of elephants, three times as many horsemen and five times as many foot soldiers. Thus, tremendously large armies were prepared to fight. By count, the Pāṇḍavas had an army of 153,090 chariots, 153,090 elephants, 459,270 horsemen and 765,450 foot soldiers, while the Kāuravas, under the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, had an army of 240,570 chariots, 240,570 elephants, 721,710 horsemen and over a million foot soldiers. Even allowing for the exaggerations common in epics, these were armies of colossal dimensions, perhaps similar to the massive armies of contemporary Persia, and far exceeding in number those of the contemporary Greeks.

Two last minute efforts were made to avoid war. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind and weak-minded king of the Kāuravas, sent his minister Saṁjaya to plead for peace with the Pāṇḍavas, but Saṁjaya was merely the personal envoy of a monarch who confessed he could not control his own sons. Drāupadī, the collective wife of the Pāṇḍavas, was prepared to sacrifice anything for revenge, and was very much for war. Krishna made a trip to see the Kāuravas without much hope, and, as he expected, was spurned by Duryodhana. There was no recourse but war. One more thing happened just before hostilities broke out. Kuntī, mother of the Pāṇḍava Princes, met Karṇa while he was at prayers near a river, and informed him that he was not the humble charioteer's son he thought he was, but her own son by the Sun god. This gratified Karṇa, but it was too late to withdraw from battle against his half brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna.

Now that we are on the eve of the great Battle of Kurukṣetra, it might be wise to review our cast of main characters.

First the Sons of Pāṇḍu, otherwise known as the Pāṇḍavas (the Good Guys):

Yudhiṣṭhira ("He who is steady in battle"), son of Pṛthā or Kuntī by the god Dharma ("Righteousness" or "Law"), the eldest of the Pāṇḍava Princes, known for his uprightness of character, rightful inheritor of the throne at Hāstinapura, king of Indraprastha, and, after the slaying of Jarāsaṁdha, emperor.

Arjuna, son of Pṛthā or Kuntī by the god Indra, and hero of the Bhagavad Gītā. (Because of his mother's two names, he is often referred to as Pārtha, "Son of Pṛthā," or Kāunteya, "Son of Kuntī".) He is a blameless knight (his name means "Silver White") and a powerful warrior noted particularly for his skill as an archer.

Bhīma, son of Pṛthā or Kuntī by the wind god Vāyu, and sometimes referred to as Vṛkodara ("the Wolf-bellied") because of his insatiable appetite. He is not the most intelligent, but he is by far the most powerful of the Pāṇḍava Princes, a man accustomed to uprooting trees to assail his enemies with. He is a great slayer of demons. He is also a half brother of Hanumān, the monkey god who assisted the great hero Rāma, of the epic The Rāmāyaṇa. During the final stages

of the Battle of Kurukṣetra, he tears apart the evil Kāurava, Duḥśāsana, and drinks his blood. “Bhīma” means “terrible” or “awful.”

Nakula (“Color of the Mongoose”), son of Mādri by one of the Aśvins, the divine horsemen who draw the chariot of the dawn. The Aśvins were Vedic gods of very early origin. Nakula led the Vatsa tribesmen in the great battle.

Sahadeva (“Accompanied by the gods”), son of Mādri by the other of the Aśvins, and twin brother of Nakula.

Next, their allies:

Drupada (“Rapid Step”), King of Pāncāla, father of Dhṛṣṭadyumna and of his twin Drūpadī, the collective wife of the Pāṇḍava Princes, thus their father-in-law.

Dhṛṣṭadyumna (“He whose Splendor is Bold”), son of Drupada, and commander in chief of the Pāṇḍava armies.

Śikhaṇḍin (“He who wears a Tuft of Hair”), son of Drupada, a reincarnation of Ambā, who had refused to marry Vicitravīrya – now a powerful warrior, though still regarded by Bhīṣma as female.

Abhimanyu (“Into Anger”), son of Arjuna by his second wife Subhadṛā.

Sātyaki (“He whose Nature is Truth”), otherwise known as Yuyudhāna (“Anxious to Fight”), a kinsman of Krishna and King of the Vṛṣṇi tribe.

Virāṭa (“Ruling Widely”), King of Matsya, at whose court the Pāṇḍava Princes had taken refuge in disguise during the thirteenth year of their exile.

Uttara (“Superior”), son of Virāṭa, and brother-in-law of Abhimanyu.

Sahadeva (“Accompanied by the Gods”), son of the dead Jarāsaṁdha, King of Māgadhā, not to be confused with the Pāṇḍava Prince of that name.

Śāibya (“Relating to the Śibis”), King of the Śibis.

Ghaṭotkaca (“Shining like a Jug” – a name derived from the fact that he was bald), son of Bhīma by a rākṣasī, and thus half rākṣasa, or demon.

Irāvāt (“Comfortable”), son of Arjuna by a Nāga (Serpent-demon) princess.

The King of the Kāśis, father of Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā, the last two of whom married Vicitravīrya and, by Vyāsa, became grandmothers of the Pāṇḍava Princes.

Dhṛṣṭaketu (“He whose Brightness is Bold”), King of the Cedis.

Cekitāna (“Intelligent”), a prince, ally of the Pāṇḍavas.

Krishna (“Black” or “Dark”), theoretically a neutral, but acting as Arjuna’s charioteer. He is the avatār of Vishnu, or the Supreme Spirit, and he speaks most of the lines of the Bhagavad Gītā. He is also related to the Pāṇḍavas by marriage, being the brother of Kuntī, mother of the Sons of Pāṇḍu, and hence their uncle.

Besides these notables, the Pāṇḍava army contained members of the Abhisāra tribe of West Kashmir, the Daśārnas, a people from south-east of Madhya Deśa, the Karūṣa, an outcaste tribe related to the Cedis, the Vatsas, inhabitants of a country of that name, and the Yādavas (members of Krishna’s tribe). This army was mobilized at Upaplavya in the land of Matsya, ruled by Virāṭa.

Now, the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, otherwise known as the Kāuravas or the Sons of Kuru (the Bad Guys):

Duryodhana (“Dirty Fighter”), eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and instigator of the events that led up to the Battle of Kurukṣetra. His primary aim was to deny Yudhiṣṭhira the throne of Hāstinapura, and to rule in his place.

Śakuni (“Large Bird” or “Cock”), brother-in-law of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and maternal uncle of the Kāurava Princes. A counsellor to Duryodhana.

Duḥśāsana (“Of Bad Commands”), a son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the warrior who dragged Drāupadī by the hair before the assembled Kāuravas after the first dice game.

Karṇa (“Ear” – a name perhaps derived from the fact that he was born wearing a pair of earrings), a son of Kuntī by the Sun god before her marriage to Pāṇḍu, and hence an unacknowledged half brother of the Pāṇḍava Princes. He was left afloat in a river as an infant and brought up by a charioteer. Until just before the battle, he was unaware of his true identity. A powerful warrior and great general.

Bhīṣma, aged warrior, teacher of the princes on both sides of the Battle of Kurukṣetra. He was the great uncle of both the Sons of Pāṇḍu and the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and he was reluctant participant in the battle. However, because of his sagacity in matters of war, he was made generalissimo of the Kāurava forces until he was slain by Arjuna and his charioteer Śikhaṇḍin. His name, like Bhīma’s means “terrible” or “awful.”

Droṇa (“Bucket”), a great warrior and teacher of warriors. A brāhman by birth, and the father of Aśvatthāman.

Kṛpa (a name related to kṛpā, f. “pity”), warrior and teacher of warriors, adopted son of King Śaṁtanu, one of the elder warriors at Kurukṣetra, and at one point, general of the Kāurava forces.

Aśvatthāman (“He who has the Strength of a Horse”), son of Droṇa by Kṛpa’s sister Kṛpī.

Vinda, a son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

Sudakṣiṇa (“Having a good Right Hand”), King of the Kambojas. The Kambojas of the Mahābhārata are located north of Kurukṣetra.

Bhagadatta (“He who is Given by Bhaga,” a god who bestows wealth), King of Prāgjyotiṣa (modern Assam), who led the Kirāṭa, a *mleccha*, or barbarian, tribe in the battle.

Śalya (“Spear”), King of Madra, brother of Pāṇḍu’s second wife, Mādrī and thus a maternal uncle of the Pāṇḍava Princes Nakula and Sahadeva.

Śālva (“Son of the Śalvas”), King of the Śālva people.

Jayadratha (“He whose Chariot is Victorious”), King of Sindhu-Sāuvīra, a country near the Indus River.

Śūrasena (“He whose Army is Valiant”), King of Mathurā.

Kṛtavarman (“He whose Armor is Ready”), an allied warrior.

Bhūriśravas (“He whose Praise Abounds”), son of King Somadatta of the Bāhlikas (Bactrians).

Citrasena (“He whose Army is Excellent”), a son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

And along with these notables, the Kāurava army contained members of the Andhaka, Ambaṣṭha, Darada, Kṣudraka, Mālava, Kaliṅga, Kekaya, Muṇḍa, Niṣāda, Śālva, Śibi (which had members on both sides), Sindhu, Bāhlika

(Bactrian), Vāṅga (Bengal), Videha and Vidarbha tribes, along with some Yādavas.

The blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra stood behind the Kāurava lines and listened while his minister Saṁjaya described the battle to him.

At the time of this legendary, and also probably historic, battle, northern India was divided into small, warlike kingdoms. It was the time of the later “Vedic” works, the Brāhmaṇas, the Upanishads and the Āraṇyakas, and, though the warriors at Kurukṣetra (with the exception of Krishna) were not particularly involved in intellectual pursuits, it was a time of enormous intellectual ferment among the brāhmins, who were engaged in interpreting, and adding to, the Vedas. The India portrayed in the Mahābhārata still retained some of the warlike traditions of the Aryans who had invaded the subcontinent less than a thousand years previously. It was also a country comprising a wide variety of races: Dravidians (the inhabitants at the time of the Aryan invasion), Persians, Scyths, Mongols, Greeks and many primitive tribes that may have originated in the pre-Dravidian races – the Australoids and paleolithic Negritos. And it also included what is now practically the whole of North India, plus some territory to the East and West. (N.B. Though the date of the Battle of Kurukṣetra has been tentatively placed by authorities at some point between 800 and 600 B.C., the Mahābhārata, of which it forms a part, is vague as to dates, and was probably in process of compilation from 400 B.C. to 300 A.D.).

The great battle was supposed to be fought according to certain rules of knightly etiquette, which were, in fact, adhered to in the very beginning. Fighting was to take place only in daylight. After sunset, everybody mixed in friendship. Single combats were supposed to be only among equals. Anyone leaving the field or sitting in Yoga posture was supposed to be immune from attack. Anyone who surrendered was to be spared. Anyone momentarily disengaged was prohibited from attacking one already engaged. Horsemen were prohibited from attacking foot soldiers. Mounted warriors could fight only with other mounted warriors. Warriors in chariots could fight only with other chariot-borne warriors. Anyone disarmed could not be attacked, and no attacks could be made on drummers, conch blowers or attendants, including charioteers. Animals were not to be killed unnecessarily or deliberately. As in all wars, however, these rules rapidly broke down as passions rose, and during the last days of the battle they were not observed at all.

Just as the first day of battle started, Arjuna, overcome with grief at the prospect of killing relatives, teachers and friends, asked Krishna, his charioteer, to draw up the chariot between the two armies, and the Bhagavad Gītā – all 2,800 lines of it – was spoken between Krishna and Arjuna. The great Yale Sanskritist Franklin Edgerton has called this a dramatic absurdity. With all due respect, I do not agree. When God speaks, it is not illogical for time to stand still while armies stand frozen in their places. In fact, I consider this frozen moment a dramatic triumph, and it is set at a point of climax in the epic where what follows is a foregone tragic conclusion.

Then the battle started. On the *first day* the Pāṇḍavas fared badly. Bhīṣma fought with Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son and his own great grand nephew, gallantly complimenting him on his technique. Abhimanyu became a great hero. When he was hard pressed by Bhīṣma, Virāṭa, Uttara (his son), Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Bhīma came to his assistance (this had been a fight between the oldest and the youngest warriors present). Uttara attacked Śalya, accidentally killing Śalya's horse, and Śalya promptly killed Uttara (first casualty). But Uttara's elephant continued to fight until it was killed. Śveta, a Pāṇḍava warrior, attacked Śalya, and for a time held off the whole Kāurava army single-handed, including Bhīṣma, but Bhīṣma finally killed him (second casualty) and went on to harass the Pāṇḍava army. The Pāṇḍavas were downcast as the sun set.

On the *second day* Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the Pāṇḍava commander in chief, arrayed his army very carefully. But Bhīṣma attacked it with fearful results. Arjuna said to Krishna, "The grandsire (Bhīṣma) must be slain." Arjuna attacked. The Kāuravas tried to protect Bhīṣma but Arjuna fought them off. The gods came down to witness the battle. Bhīṣma hit Krishna (Arjuna's charioteer) with an arrow. This angered Arjuna, but he did not succeed in killing Bhīṣma. At another point in the battlefield Droṇa was attacking Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the Pāṇḍava generalissimo. The latter was hard pressed, but Bhīma came to his aid and carried him off in his chariot. Duryodhana then sent the Kaliṅga army against Bhīma who slew great numbers. Bhīṣma supported the Kaliṅgas: Sātyaki and others supported Bhīma and Abhimanyu. Sātyaki killed Bhīṣma's charioteer (foul play) and Bhīṣma was forced to flee. The Kāuravas were routed.

On the *third day*, the Kāuravas attacked Arjuna. Śakuni attacked Sātyaki and Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu rescued Sātyaki, whose chariot had been destroyed. Droṇa and Bhīṣma attacked Yudhiṣṭhira. Bhīma and his son Ghaṭotkaca attacked Duryodhana with heroism. Duryodhana swooned in his chariot, hit by Bhīma's arrows, and was forced to retreat. Bhīma slew Kāuravas by the score. Then Bhīṣma and Droṇa regrouped the Kāuravas and Duryodhana returned to the field. Duryodhana criticized Bhīṣma for lack of zeal. Bhīṣma then made a tremendous attack on the Pāṇḍavas, and the Pāṇḍavas scattered. Krishna egged on Arjuna to attack Bhīṣma, but Arjuna's heart was not in it. Bhīṣma, with great gallantry, continually praised his opponents. The Kāuravas were turned back at the end of the day.

On the *fourth day* the Kāuravas advanced under Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Duryodhana. Aśvatthāman, Bhūriśravas, Śalya and Citrasena surrounded Abhimanyu and attacked him, but his father, Arjuna, came to his rescue, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna arrived with reinforcements. Then Bhīma appeared, and the Kāuravas sent a large force of elephants against him. He scattered them all and caused panic among the Kāuravas. Bhīma then attacked Duryodhana and nearly killed him. Bhīma's bow was shattered. He picked up a new one and cut Duryodhana's bow in two. Duryodhana smote Bhīma so heavily that he was forced to sit upon the ground. Bhīma's son Ghaṭotkaca came to his defense. Eight of Duryodhana's brothers were killed by Bhīma. By nightfall the Pāṇḍavas had won a victory, and

the Kāuravas were downcast. Bhīṣma advised suing for peace, but Duryodhana wouldn't listen to him.

On the *fifth day* Bhīṣma attacked the Pāṇḍavas and caused considerable havoc. Arjuna then attacked Bhīṣma. Duryodhana complained to Droṇa about the weakness of the Kāurava attacks. Droṇa then attacked Sātyaki and Bhīma came to his defense. Droṇa, Bhīṣma and Śalya together attacked Bhīma, but Śikhaṇḍin came to the rescue. At this point Bhīṣma turned away. He considered Śikhaṇḍin to be a woman, and he would not fight with women. Droṇa attacked Śikhaṇḍin and compelled him to withdraw. There ensued a big, confused battle in which the sons of Sātyaki were slain. Sātyaki had attacked Bhūriśravas in an effort to protect them, but Bhūriśravas killed them all. Bhīma rescued Sātyaki. Duryodhana rescued Bhūriśravas. Arjuna slew thousands. It was a big Pāṇḍava victory.

On the *sixth day* Droṇa's charioteer was killed (foul play). There was great slaughter. Bhīma fought eleven of the Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra all by himself, scattered them and pursued them on foot wielding his mace. He got behind the Kāurava lines and Dhṛṣṭadyumna went to rescue him. Duryodhana and the other Kāuravas attacked Bhīma and Dhṛṣṭadyumna who were in their midst. At this point Dhṛṣṭadyumna, being surrounded along with Bhīma, used a secret weapon (the Pramohana, "that which bewilders the mind") which he had received from Droṇa as a student, and with it stupefied the Kāuravas. Then Duryodhana arrived with a similar secret weapon (it must have resembled tear, or nerve gas) and stupefied the Pāṇḍavas. But Yudhiṣṭhira came on with a large force to support Bhīma, who promptly revived and joined in. Droṇa killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna's horses (foul play) and shattered his chariot. Dhṛṣṭadyumna took refuge in Abhimanyu's chariot. The Pāṇḍavas wavered. Duryodhana was wounded by Bhīma and rescued by Kṛpa. Bhīṣma scattered the Pāṇḍavas, and the day was declared a victory for the Kāuravas.

On the *seventh day* there were many single combats. Virāṭa was defeated by Droṇa. Virāṭa's son Śaṁga was killed (this was the third of Virāṭa's sons to be slain). But the Kāuravas were getting the worst of it. Later, Yudhiṣṭhira defeated Śrutāyu, killing his horses and charioteer (foul play). Duryodhana's army was demoralized. Cekitāna attacked Kṛpa, killing *his* charioteer and horses (more foul play). Kṛpa retaliated by engaging Cekitāna in single combat on the ground, fighting until both fell, wounded and exhausted. Bhīma took Cekitāna away in his chariot. Śakuni performed a similar service for Kṛpa. Bhīṣma attacked Abhimanyu, but Abhimanyu was rescued by his father Arjuna. The other four Pāṇḍava Princes joined in, but Bhīṣma held his own against all five. At sunset, the warriors of both sides retired to their tents, nursing their wounds.

On the *eighth day* Bhīma killed eight of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons. Irāvata, Arjuna's son by his Nāga princess wife, was killed by the rākṣasa warrior Alambuṣa. Arjuna was downcast. Ghaṭotkaca attacked the Kāuravas with great slaughter. Duryodhana advanced and was almost killed by Ghaṭotkaca, being rescued at the last minute by Droṇa. Sixteen sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra were killed that day.

On the *ninth day* Bhīṣma slew Pāṇḍavas by the thousand. Abhimanyu defeated

the rākṣasa warrior Alambuṣa. Sātyaki duelled with Aśvatthāman, Droṇa with Arjuna, and Bhīṣma again attacked the Pāṇḍavas. Krishna suggested that Arjuna kill Bhīṣma, but, again, Arjuna had not the heart to kill his old teacher. Exasperated, Krishna got down from the chariot and proposed to attack Bhīṣma on foot, but Arjuna pulled him back. The day was generally victorious for the Kāuravas.

On the *tenth day* Bhīṣma was killed, or to be more precise, mortally wounded. Arjuna attacked him with Śikhaṇḍin as his charioteer (Bhīṣma had already prophesied that he would be invincible except in the presence of Śikhaṇḍin, whom he considered to be a woman). Śikhaṇḍin shot arrows at Bhīṣma. Arjuna sent a hail of arrows, piercing Bhīṣma's armor at points that Śikhaṇḍin had missed. Bhīṣma died very slowly, supported by a cushion of arrows. He claimed that he had been killed by Arjuna (an honor), though Śikhaṇḍin felt that he, or she, had fulfilled Am̐bā's vow by bringing the great son of King Śaṁtanu to his end. The gods folded their hands in reverent salutation as Bhīṣma was defeated. The battle stopped while both sides paid homage to the old warrior. Bhīṣma asked for water, and Arjuna shot an arrow into the ground. Water sprang forth. "Gaṅgā (the Ganges) has come up to quench her son's thirst," they said. Bhīṣma still counselled peace. Karṇa approached him asking for his blessing. Bhīṣma advised him not to fight. But Karṇa insisted that since he had cast his lot with Duryodhana, he had no choice but to continue. Bhīṣma survived for fifty-eight days (he kept himself alive deliberately so that he could die during the "upper going," or northern phase of the sun, and thus attain nirvāṇa (see footnote to stanza 23, book VIII of the Gītā)). He delivered several didactic discourses: he was still living, in fact, after the battle had ended.

The Kāuravas then made a plan to capture Yudhiṣṭhira alive. It was Duryodhana's idea, and Droṇa took it up gladly because he did not want to see Yudhiṣṭhira killed (it will be remembered that Yudhiṣṭhira was the rightful heir to the throne of Hāstinapura, and that Duryodhana was seeking to deprive him of the right). Duryodhana's fundamental purpose was to get Yudhiṣṭhira into another game of dice. The Pāṇḍavas, however, heard of the plan and made their preparations to counter it.

On the *eleventh day* Droṇa attempted to capture Yudhiṣṭhira, but Yudhiṣṭhira fled on a swift horse, holding that it was no disgrace for a warrior to flee before a brāhman. There was single combat between Sahadeva and Śakuni. Śalya was defeated by Nakula; Dhṛṣṭaketu was defeated by Kṛpa. Sātyaki engaged Kṛtavarma; Virāṭa engaged Karṇa. Abhimanyu engaged four prominent Kāuravas at once. Bhīma defeated Śalya. The Kāuravas began to lose courage. Droṇa again attempted to capture Yudhiṣṭhira, but was foiled by Arjuna, who forced Droṇa to retreat. The day was a defeat for the Kāuravas.

On the *twelfth day* the Kāuravas, seeing that they could not capture Yudhiṣṭhira while Arjuna was present in the field, made a plan to draw Arjuna off and kill him. Suśarman, chief of the army of the King of Trigarta, along with his four brothers, attacked Arjuna. He slew them all. Droṇa again tried to capture Yudhiṣṭhira, but Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the other Pāṇḍava Princes stood by to protect him. Dhṛṣṭadyumna attacked Droṇa, but Droṇa avoided him to get at Arjuna.

Drupada stood in his way. Droṇa attacked him, and then made for Yudhiṣṭhira. Two Pāṇcāla princes, Vṛka and Satyajit, were killed, and Virāṭa's son Śatānīka was killed by Droṇa while Śatānīka was attempting to attack him. Pāṇcālya, another Pāṇcāla prince, was killed by Droṇa. Then occurred one of the most heroic feats of the entire battle. Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, broke through the line of the Kāurava forces, and found himself surrounded. In a tremendous display of valor, he fended off the entire Kāurava army, including Duryodhana. The Pāṇḍavas tried to get to Abhimanyu to rescue him, but were prevented. The Kāuravas, throwing good form to the winds, ganged up on Abhimanyu and disarmed him. He continued to fight with a chariot wheel as his only weapon. Finally, Lakṣmaṇa, son of Duḥśāsana, struck him to the ground, killing him. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Yuyutsu, who was fighting on the Pāṇḍava side, was so disgusted by this performance that he left the field. Yudhiṣṭhira blamed himself for the death of Abhimanyu. Arjuna was told about his son's death, and vowed vengeance on Jayadratha, King of the Sindhus, who was indirectly responsible (he had helped to trap Abhimanyu)

The battle continued. Droṇa failed in all his attempts to capture Yudhiṣṭhira. The Kāurava forces were stampeded. Bhagadatta, King of Prāgiyotiṣa, was indignant over the rout of the Kāuravas. He attacked Bhīma and destroyed his chariot and horses. Bhīma, on foot, attacked the underside of Bhagadatta's elephant, inflicting wounds and driving the animal mad. All these were unfair tactics, but the rules of war were rapidly breaking down. Bhagadatta was attacked on all sides by the Pāṇḍavas, but Bhagadatta's maddened elephant caused great havoc among them. Arjuna, with Krishna as his charioteer, then made a tremendous attack on Bhagadatta, killing both him and his elephant. Śakuni's brothers, Vṛṣa and Acala, tried to rally the Kāurava forces, but were killed by Arjuna. Śakuni attacked Arjuna, but was forced to flee.

On the *thirteenth day* Arjuna, raining showers of arrows, penetrated the Kāurava ranks, and many Kāuravas fled. Duḥśāsana became infuriated, and rushed against Arjuna with a force of elephants. But Arjuna pierced the elephant host, and Duḥśāsana's force, along with Duḥśāsana himself, fled, seeking Droṇa's protection. Arjuna proceeded against Droṇa's army with the object of getting at Jayadratha. Yudhāmanyu and Uttamāujas followed him to protect him. Arjuna smote the Kāurava army, including an elephant force brought against him by the Aṅgas and Kālīṅgas. Arjuna slew horses, elephants and warriors. Meanwhile, Bhīma attacked a Kāurava warrior named Jalasamdhā, Son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, while Yudhiṣṭhira engaged Kṛtavarman and Dhṛṣṭadyumna engaged Droṇa. Seeing the Kāurava forces slaughtered by Sātyaki, Droṇa rushed toward him. At that point, Arjuna who was fighting the army of Jayadratha, blew his conch horn. Yudhiṣṭhira, hearing it, and suspecting that Arjuna was in trouble, sent Sātyaki to the rescue. Then, Bhīma attacked Droṇa with some success, and proceeded through the Kāurava lines, seeking Arjuna. Karṇa rushed at Bhīma, and caused him to retreat. Five of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons attacked Bhīma, but he dispatched them all.

On the *fourteenth day* Bhūriśravas, Prince of the Bāhlikas, advanced against

Sātyaki and brought him to the ground, dragging him by the hair and striking him on the chest with his feet. Seeing Sātyaki's plight, Arjuna, from a distance where he was engaged with Jayadratha, sent a stream of arrows at Bhūriśravas, cutting off his right arm. Bhūriśravas sat upon the ground in Yoga position. Sātyaki then beheaded Bhūriśravas as he sat. Arjuna pressed Jayadratha. There had been a vow made by Jayadratha's father Vṛddhakṣatra that the head of whoever caused his son's head to fall to the ground would burst into a hundred pieces. Krishna informed Arjuna of this vow, and Arjuna, as he beheaded Jayadratha, caused a stream of arrows to convey the head into the lap of his father, who was meditating nearby. When his father roused himself from meditation, *he* let his son's head fall to the ground and his head burst into a hundred pieces. The battle continued into the night by torchlight, and the Pāṇḍavas attacked Droṇa, but Droṇa slew his old enemy Drupada as well as Virāṭa.

On the evening of the *fifteenth day* all knightly ethics were totally discarded. Even Krishna had lost all sense of honor – a rather surprising state considering that he was the avatār of Vishnu or the Supreme Spirit. He suggested naming one of the Pāṇḍava elephants Aśvatthāman, after Droṇa's son and then killing the animal. The idea was carried out. During a lull in the fighting, Droṇa was told that Aśvatthāman was dead, and thought that he had lost his son. He appealed to Yudhiṣṭhira for confirmation knowing that Yudhiṣṭhira never lied. But honor was at such a low ebb that Yudhiṣṭhira did lie, confirming the death of Aśvatthāman. Droṇa, grieving, laid down his arms and was promptly decapitated by Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. After Droṇa's death, Karṇa took charge of the Kāurava army.

On the *sixteenth day* Karṇa challenged Yudhiṣṭhira to fight, but during the ensuing combat Yudhiṣṭhira ignominiously fled for the second time. A little later Bhīma, recalling Drāupadī's humiliation after the dice game, attacked Duḥśāsana, who had dragged Drāupadī before the assembled Kāuravas, tore him apart and drank his blood as he had promised to do. The warriors on both sides were horrified by Bhīma's act.

On the *seventeenth day* there was a long and terrible duel between Arjuna and Karṇa. At one point a wheel of Karṇa's chariot became stuck in the mud, and he was forced to leap to the ground to try to raise it. He invoked the laws of chivalry, and asked Arjuna not to attack him while he was engaged in this task. He also thought of the *mantra* that he had learned from the brāhman warrior Paraśurāma to use with the Śakti. But, as predicted, he could not remember it. Krishna egged Arjuna on, and Arjuna unethically slew Karṇa. A little later, Yudhiṣṭhira, who had previously fled before Karṇa's attack, reproached Arjuna for not supporting him at the time. This enraged Arjuna, and he would have turned on his brother to kill him, but for the intervention of Krishna (even the Pāṇḍavas were now quarreling among themselves). After the death of Karṇa, Śalya assumed command of the Kāurava forces.

On the *eighteenth and last day* the tide turned definitely in favor of the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana was now practically alone. He fled and concealed himself in a nearby lake (he possessed the power of remaining under water). A little later Sahadeva slew Śakuni and Yudhiṣṭhira slew Śalya. After Śalya's death, Aśvat-

tāman took charge of the Kāurava forces. Bhīma next killed all the remaining Sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra except the absent Duryodhana. Then he searched for Duryodhana and discovered his hiding place in the lake. He taunted Duryodhana, and forced him to emerge. A tremendous battle with clubs ensued between Bhīma and Duryodhana. Finally, Bhīma, hitting below the belt, broke both Duryodhana's legs with his club, and trampled upon his body. This unfair and brutal act aroused the anger of Yudhiṣṭhira, who struck Bhīma across the face and asked Arjuna to take him away. Balarāma, Krishna's brother, had finally appeared on the field, had witnessed Bhīma's foul blow, and was so disgusted that he attacked Bhīma with a plow (Balarāma's customary weapon). He was stopped by Krishna, and left angrily for their capital city Dvārakā. Duryodhana, still alive, rebuked Krishna, calling him the son of a slave (an allusion to his cowherd foster father).

Then Aśvatthāman took an oath to exterminate the Pāṇḍavas, and egged on by the dying Duryodhana, he, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman, the last remaining Kāurava nobles decided on a night raid, approaching the Pāṇḍavas in their camp. Kṛpa was against this idea, but he went along. The Pāṇḍava Princes were away at the time, Aśvatthāman first killed his father's slayer, Dhṛṣṭadyumna by stamping on him as he slept. Next he killed Śikhaṇḍin who was also asleep, as well as the warriors Uttamāujas, Prativindhya, Sutasoma, Śatānika and Śrutakīrti. Using a magic weapon (the brahmāstra), he slew the unborn Parikṣit, son of Abhimanyu, who was still in his mother's womb. However, Parikṣit came alive again, owing to Krishna's magic intervention. Aśvatthāman then killed the five young sons of Drāupadī by her five husbands. Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman took no part in this cowardly slaughter; they were keeping watch at the gates of the camp. Aśvatthāman brought the five heads of the sons of Drāupadī back to Duryodhana, saying that they were the heads of the five Pāṇḍava Princes. But Duryodhana knew better, and he reproached Aśvatthāman for slaying innocent children. Then he died.

The Pāṇḍava Princes, returning to their camp, saw what Aśvatthāman had done, and pursued him furiously. Bhīma fought with Aśvatthāman and overcame him. Aśvatthāman took a jewel from his forehead and presented it to Bhīma in token of defeat. Bhīma gave the jewel to Drāupadī, who later presented it to Yudhiṣṭhira as an ornament for his crown.

The battle was over. Only three of the warriors on the Kāurava side – Kṛpa, Aśvatthāman and Kṛtavarman – survived. The children of the Pāṇḍavas had all been killed except Arjuna's grandchild Parikṣit. The bodies of the slain warriors were gathered up, wrapped in perfumed linen, laid upon a great funeral pyre and burned. Yudhiṣṭhira was proclaimed King of Hāstinapura. Dhṛtarāṣṭra mourned the loss of his hundred sons. He embraced Yudhiṣṭhira as a token of peace. But when Bhīma was announced to the blind king, Krishna put a metal statue in his place, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra crushed it to powder. Gāndhārī, wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and mother of his hundred sons, did not forgive, but nevertheless blessed the Pāṇḍavas. Yudhiṣṭhira reigned at Hāstinapura, but he was not happy. Krishna returned to Dvārakā. Yudhiṣṭhira's reign lasted for fifteen years, during which he treated the

blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra with respect. As for Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself, he practiced austerities and went to live in the forest, accompanied by Kuntī, Gāndhārī and his minister Saṁjaya. They returned after three years only to be burned to death as their house caught fire. Saṁjaya, however, escaped the fire and went to the Himālaya as a *saṁnyāsīn*, or renouncer of all the things of life.

Krishna ruled in Dvārakā for thirty-six years, but his tribe, the Yādavas, gave themselves up to drunken revelry. In one of their drunken orgies Krishna's son, Pradyumna, and also Sātyaki were killed. Balarāma was so disgusted at this that he retired to the forest, assumed a Yoga position and died. Krishna realized that the time had come to end his role as the *avatār* of Vishnu. He was shot by a hunter as the *avatār* escaped. The Pāṇḍavas crowned Parikṣit, son of Abhimanyu and Uttara, and grandson of Arjuna, king. Then they departed for the Himālaya along with Drāupadī. On the way, Drāupadī, Sahadeva and Nakula died. Then Arjuna and Bhīma died. Yudhiṣṭhira alone was left, and he continued to climb. A dog had joined him. The god Indra sent a chariot to take Yudhiṣṭhira to heaven but would not take the dog. Yudhiṣṭhira had become fond of the dog and refused to go without it. Then the dog vanished. It had been the god Dharma (Yudhiṣṭhira's father) in disguise. Yudhiṣṭhira finally found himself on Mount Meru, the Olympos of India, and, much to his disgust, found Duryodhana there. A messenger took Yudhiṣṭhira through a sort of hades, where he found the other Pāṇḍava Princes and Karṇa. He chose to remain with them. Then heaven opened, and Yudhiṣṭhira and the others became godlike.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE VOCABULARIES

abl., ablative.

acc., accusative.

act., active.

adj., adjective.

adv., adverb.

*BV cpd., Bahuvrihi compound. A compound which is always adjectival to a noun or pronoun, either expressed or implicit. The last member is a noun and the first usually an adjective. Its structure can be most simply explained by examples: "He whose B (last member) is A (first member)" or "This of which the B (last member) is A (first member)." Examples can readily be found in English: "redneck," i.e. he whose neck is red; "bluebeard," i.e. he whose beard is blue; "hardhat," i.e. he whose hat is hard. In Sanskrit: mahāratha, he whose chariot is mighty; Dhṛtarāṣṭra (proper name), he by whom the kingdom is held; mahābāho (vocative), O Thou whose arms are mighty; anantarūpa, that of which the form is unending; avyak-tādini, such that their beginnings are unmanifest.

dat., dative.

DV cpd., Dvandva (copulative) compound.

esp., especially.

f., feminine.

fut., future.

gen., genitive.

indic., indicative.

ifc., "in fine compositi," "at the end of a compound," indicating the last member of a compound.

inst., instrumental.

interrog., interrogative.

irreg., irregular.

*KD cpd., Karmadhāraya compound, a compound the members of which have the same case. There are three types: (a) the first member is an adjective, the second a noun. Example in English: "highway," in Sanskrit: "mahādhana," "great wealth." (b) both members are nouns. Example in English: "gentleman-thief," i.e. a thief who is a gentleman; "boy-actress" (in Shakespeare's time), i.e. an actress who is really a boy. Examples in Sanskrit: "rājarṣi," "king-sage;" "devajana," "god people." (c) both members are adjectives. Examples in English: "pale-red," "snow-white." Examples in Sanskrit: "dhūmarohita," "greyish red," "uttarapūrva," "north-east."

lit., literally

loc., locative.

loc. absol., locative absolute.

m., masculine.

mid., middle.

n., neuter.

nom., nominative.

p., past.

pass., passive.

pl., plural.

pr., present.

saṁdhi – not an abbreviation, but a term indicating an alteration in accord with the laws of euphonious combination of words.

sg., singular.

*TP cpd., Tatpuruṣa compound. A compound of two words which would ordinarily have different case endings. Examples in English:

“mountain peak,” i.e. the peak of a mountain, etc. In Sanskrit: jīvaloka (jīva, living; loka, world), the world of the living; rājendra (rāja, king; Indra, chief), chief of kings, etc. The members of these compounds are nouns.
voc., vocative.

* I am indebted to the Sanskrit scholar J. A. B. van Buitenen of the University of Chicago for these remarkably clear definitions of Sanskrit compounds. They are far preferable to the ones listed in Whitney's Sanskrit Grammar.

EPITHETS (NICKNAMES) USED IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

For Krishna:

Hṛṣīkeśa – The Bristling-haired One.
Acyuta – Imperishable One, or One who has not Fallen.
Mādhava – Descendant of Madhu (a Yādava or Mādhava patriarch).
Keśava – The Handsome-haired One.
Govinda – Chief of Herdsmen.
Madhusūdana – Destroyer of the Demon Madhu (properly an epithet of Vishnu).
Janārdana – Agitator of Men, or Man-kind-tormenting (an epithet of Vishnu).
Vārṣṇeya – Clansman of the Vṛṣṇis.
Keśinisūdana – Slayer of the Demon Keśin.
Arisūdana – Destroyer of the Enemy.
Bhagavān – Blessed One.
Vāsudeva – Son of Vasudeva.
Prabho – Splendid One (voc.).
Mahābāho – Mighty Armed One (a general epithet of warriors).
Yādava – Descendant of Yadu.

And in the Great Manifestation of Book XI:

Puruṣottama – Supreme Spirit, or Best of Men.
Mahātman – whose self is great.
Viṣṇu – Vishnu (whose avatār Krishna is).
Deveśa (Deva Īśa) – Lord of Gods.
Anantarūpa – whose form is endless, Infinite Form.
Prajāpati – Lord of Creatures.
Aprameya – Immeasurable One.
Apratimaprabhāva – Incomparable Glory.
Īśam Īḍyam – Lord to be Praised.
Deva – God.

Sahasrabāho – Thousand-armed One (voc.).

For Arjuna:

Dhanamjaya – Conqueror of Wealth.
Pāṇḍava – Son of Pāṇḍu.
Kapidhvaja – The Monkey-bannered (a descriptive term rather than an epithet).
Pārtha – Son of Prthā.
Kāunteya – Son of Kuntī.
Guḍākeśa – Thick-haired One.
Paramtapa – Scorcher of the Foe.
Puruṣarṣabha – Bull among Men.
Mahābāho – Mighty Armed One (a general epithet of warriors).
Kurunandana – Son of Kuru, or Joy of Kuru.*
Anagha – Blameless One.
Bhārata – Descendant of Bharata (a general epithet, also applied to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra).
Bharatarṣabha – Bull of the Bharatas.
Dehabhṛtām Vara – Best of the Embodied.
Kuruśreṣṭha – Best of Kurus.*
Savyasācin – Ambidextrous Archer.
Kiriṭin – Diademed One.
Kurupravīra – Chief Kuru* Hero.
Bharataśreṣṭha – Best of the Bharatas.
Bharatasattama – Highest of the Bharatas.
Puruṣavyāghra – Tiger among Men.

* Reference to the ancient patriarch Kuru testifies to the fact that he was the common ancestor of both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kāuravas (Sons of Kuru).

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BOOK I

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच ।

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca

Dhṛtarāṣṭra spoke:

1

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे

*dharmaḥkṣetre kuruḥkṣetre**

when in the field of virtue, in the field of
Kuru

समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

samavetā yuyutsavaḥ

assembled together, desiring to fight

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś cāiva

mine and the Sons of Pāṇḍu

किम् अकुर्वत संजय ॥

kim akurvata saṁjaya

what they did? Saṁjaya?

Dhṛitarashtra spoke:

When they were in the field

of virtue, in the field of the Kurus,

Assembled together, desiring to fight,

What did my army and that of the

Sons of Pandu do, Saṁjaya?

dhṛtarāṣṭras (m. nom. sg.), Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind Kuru king to whom the Bhagavad Gītā is to be related by Saṁjaya, his minister. The name, a BV cpd., means “He by whom the kingdom is held.”

uvāca (3rd sg. perfect act. √vac), he said, he spoke.

dharma (m.), duty, law, righteousness, virtue, honor.

kṣetre (n. loc. sg.), in the field, on the field.

kuru (m.), Kuru, the royal dynasty to which Dhṛtarāṣṭra belongs.

kṣetre (n. loc. sg.), in the field, on the field.

samavetās (m. nom. pl. p. pass. participle *sam ava* √i), come together, assembled.

yuyutsavaḥ (m. nom. pl. desiderative adj. from √yudh), desiring to fight, battle-hungry, desiring to do battle.

māmakās (m. nom. pl.), mine, my.

pāṇḍavās (m. nom. pl.), the Sons of Pāṇḍu. *ca*, and.

eva, indeed (used as a rhythmic filler).

kim (interrog.), what?

akurvata (3rd imperf. middle √kr), they did.

saṁjaya (voc.), Saṁjaya, minister to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who relates to him the bulk of the Bhagavad Gītā. The name means “completely victorious.”

* Kurukṣetra is an actual place, a small plain in the Panjab north of Delhi near Panipat.

I

संजय उवाच ।
saṁjaya uvāca
Sanjaya spoke:

saṁjadyas (m. nom. sg.), the narrator, minister to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
uvāca (3rd sg. perfect act. √*vac*), he said, he spoke.

2

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं
dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavāṇikam
seeing indeed the Pāṇḍava army

dr̥ṣṭvā (gerund √*dr̥ś*), seeing, having seen.
tu, indeed, truly.
pāṇḍava (adj.), pertaining to the Sons of Pāṇḍu.

व्यूढं दुर्योधनस् तदा ।
vyūḍham duryodhanas tadā
arrayed, Duryodhana then

anikam (m. n. acc. sg.), army, fighting force, face, appearance, edge.
(*pāṇḍava-anikam*, m. n. acc. sg. TP cpd., army of the Sons of Pāṇḍu.)
vyūḍham (m. n. acc. sg.), arrayed, drawn up in battle formation.

आचार्यमुपसंगम्य
ācāryamupasaṁgamyā
the Master (Droṇa) approaching,

duryodhanas (m. nom. sg.), Duryodhana, chief of the Kāurava (Kuru) army, son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and chief inciter of the battle. The name means "Dirty fighter."

राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥
rājā vacanam abravīt
the King (Duryodhana) word he spoke:

tadā, then, at that time.
ācāryam (m. acc. sg.), teacher, master, to the teacher, to the master (Droṇa).
upasaṁgamyā (gerund *upa sam* √*gam*), approaching, going up to.
rājā (m. nom. sg.), the King, royal personage, here referring to Duryodhana.
vacanam (n. acc. sg.), word, speech.
abravīt (3rd sg. imperf. act. √*brū*), he said, he spoke.

Sanjaya spoke:
Seeing indeed the army
Of the sons of Pandu arrayed,
King Duryodhana, approaching his
Master (Drona),
Spoke these words:

पश्येतां पाण्डुपुत्राणाम्
paśyētām pāṇḍuputrāṇām
 behold this of the sons of Pāṇḍu

आचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।
ācārya mahatīm camūm
 Master, the great army,

व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण
vyūdhām drupadaputreṇa
 arrayed by the Son of Drupada

तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥
tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā
 of thee as student wise.

**Behold O Master, this great army
 Of the sons of Pandu
 Arrayed by the son of Drupada,
 Wise by your instruction.**

paśya (2nd imperative act. \sqrt{pas}), behold!
 perceive! see!
etām (f. acc. sg.), this.
pāṇḍuputrāṇām (m. gen. pl.), of the Sons of Pāṇḍu.
ācārya (voc.), O Master, O Teacher (here applied to the aged warrior Droṇa,* who has instructed many warriors on both sides of the battle).
mahatīm (f. acc. sg.), great, mighty.
camūm (f. acc. sg.), army, division of warriors.
vyūdhām (f. acc. sg. p. pass. participle $\sqrt{vāh}$), arrayed, arranged in battle formation.
drupada, Drupada,* father of Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna, who is chief of the Pāṇḍava army. The name means “rapid step.”
putreṇa (m. inst. sg.), by the son, i.e., by Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna, whose name means “bold splendor” or “audacious majesty.”
tava (gen. sg.), of thee.
śiṣyeṇa (m. inst. sg.), “by the to be taught,” by student, as a student.
dhīmatā (m. inst. sg.), by wise, by intelligent.

* Both Droṇa and Drupada, as befits great heroes in mythology, had odd births. Drupada’s father, Pr̥ṣata, lost his seed at the sight of Menakā, an apsarā (nymph), wife of a Gandharva (aereal being). He tried to trample out the seed. Hence his name “rapid step.” Nevertheless, Drupada was born from this seed. Droṇa’s father, Bharadvāja, lost his seed under similar circumstances. It fell into a bucket he was carrying. Droṇa means “bucket” – see chapter on the setting of the Bhagavad Gītā.

अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा

atra śūrā maheṣvāsā

here (are) heroes, mighty archers

भीमार्जुनसमा युधि ।

bhīmārjunasamā yudhi

Bhīma and Arjuna equal to in battle.

युयुधानो विराटश्च

yuyudhāno virāṭas ca

Yuyudhāna and Virāṭa

द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥

drupadaś ca mahārathah

and Drupada, whose chariot is great.

Here are heroes, mighty archers,
Equal in battle to Bhima and Arjuna,
Yuyudhana and Virata,
And Drupada, the great warrior;

atra, here, in this case.

śūrās (m. nom. pl.), heroes.

maheṣvāsās (m. nom. pl.), *mahā iṣu āsās* "mighty arrow hurlers," mighty archers.

bhīma, Bhīma, a powerful warrior, brother of Arjuna, son of Kuntī by the wind god Vāyu. The name means "tremendous," or "awful."

arjuna, Arjuna, the warrior hero of the Bhagavad Gītā, son of Kuntī or Prthā. The name means "silver white."

samās (m. nom. pl.), the same, equivalent, equal.

(*bhīma-arjuna-samās* m. nom. pl., TP cpd., equal to Bhīma and Arjuna.)

yudhi (m. loc. sg.), in battle, in fighting.

yuyudhānas (m. nom. sg.), Yuyudhāna, son of Satyaka. A Pāṇḍava ally. The name means "anxious to fight."

virāṭas (m. nom. sg.), Virāṭa, a warrior king with whom the Pāṇḍavas once took refuge. A Pāṇḍava ally. The name refers to a district in India.

ca, and.

drupadas (m. nom. sg.), Drupada ("Rapid Step"), a Pāṇḍava warrior (see footnote on p. 53 above).

ca, and.

mahārathas (m. nom. sg.), epithet for Drupada, mighty warrior (as BV cpd.), he whose chariot is great.

धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः

dhr̥ṣṭaketuś cekitānaḥ

Dhr̥ṣṭaketu, Cekitāna

काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान् ।

kāśirājaś ca vīryavān

and the King of Kasi, valorous,

पुरुजित् कुन्तिभोजश्च

purujit kuntibhojaś ca

Purujit and Kuntibhoja

शैब्यश्च नरपुङ्गवः ॥

śāibyaś ca narapuṅgavaḥ

and Śāibya, man-bull:

Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana,

And the valorous King of Kashi,

Purojit and Kuntibhoja

And Shaibya, bull among men.

dhr̥ṣṭaketuś (m. nom. sg.), Dhr̥ṣṭaketu, King of Cedi, a Pāṇḍava ally. The name means "bold leader."

cekitānaś (m. nom. sg.), Cekitāna, a prince, ally of the Pāṇḍavas. The name means "highly intelligent."

kāśirājaś (m. nom. sg.), the King of the Kāśis, thought to be a tribe inhabiting the vicinity of modern Benares, an ally of the Pāṇḍavas.

ca, and.

vīryavān (m. nom. sg.), valorous, full of heroism.

purujit (m. nom. sg.), brother of Kuntibhoja, a prince of the Kunti people. The name means "he who conquers widely." A Pāṇḍava ally.

kuntibhojaś (m. nom. sg.), Kuntibhoja, a Pāṇḍava ally.

ca, and.

śāibyaś (m. nom. sg.), Śāibya, King of the Śibis, a Pāṇḍava ally.

ca, and.

nara (m.), man.

puṅgavaś (m. nom. sg.), bull.

(*narapuṅgavaś* m. nom. sg., man-bull, bull among men.)

* Kuntibhoja, a Yādava prince, has an interesting relationship with the Pāṇḍava princes. He is, by adoption, their father-in-law, having adopted Pṛthā, daughter of his cousin Śūra, who was also a Yādava prince. Upon adoption, Pṛthā took her foster father's name and became known as Kuntī. Kuntī, formerly Pṛthā, thus belonged to the Yādava clan, and was an aunt of Krishna, whose father, Vasudeva, was her brother (and a son of Śūra). Ultimately she became the mother of the first three Pāṇḍava princes (Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna), as well as Karna. Throughout the Bhagavad Gītā Arjuna is referred to as Pārtha (Son of Pṛthā), or Kāunteya (Son of Kuntī). – See chapter on "The Setting of the Bhagavad Gītā."

युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त
yudhāmanyuś ca vikrānta
 and Yudhāmanyu, mighty,

उत्तमौजश्च वीर्यवान् ।
uttamāujaś ca vīryavān
 and Uttamāujas, valorous;

सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च
sāubhadro drāupadeyāś ca
 the Son of Subhadrā and the Sons of
 Drāupadī

सर्व एव महारथाः ॥
sarva eva mahārathāḥ
 of all of whom the chariots are great.

And mighty Yudhamanyu
 And valorous Uttamaejas;
 The son of Subhadra and the sons of
 Draupadi,
 All indeed great warriors.

yudhāmanyus (m. nom. sg.), Yudhāmanyu, a warrior ally of the Pāṇḍavas. The name means “fighting with spirit.”

ca, and.

vikrāntas (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle *vikram*), striding forth, bold, courageous.

uttamāujas (m. nom. sg.), Uttamāujas, a warrior ally of the Pāṇḍavas. The name means “of highest power” or “of supreme valor.”

ca, and.

vīryavān (m. nom. sg.), valorous, full of heroism.

sāubhadras (m. nom. sg.), the son of Subhadrā, i.e. Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadrā (Krishna’s sister) by Arjuna, who abducted her with Krishna’s consent.

drāupadeyās (m. nom. pl.), the Sons of Drāupadī, who was the collective wife of the five Pāṇḍava princes and the daughter of Drupada. There were five sons of Drāupadī: Prativindhya (by Yudhiṣṭhira), Sutaśoma (by Bhīma), Śrutakīrti (by Arjuna), Śatānīka (by Nakula) and Śrutakarman (by Sahadeva).

ca, and.

sarva (*saṁdhi* for *sarve*, nom. pl.), all.

eva, indeed (often used as a rhythmic filler).

mahārathās (m. nom. pl.), great warriors, (as BV cpd.), those whose chariots are great.