

The Bhagavad Gita

The Original Sanskrit

and

An English Translation
Lars Martin Fosse

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YogaVidya.com

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The Latin dedication means “For Sarolta Eva Maria, my dearest daughter.”

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Loretta is the essential element.

Saroltae Evaë Mariae carissimae filiae

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Introduction

YOU ARE about to have the profound pleasure of reading one of the truly great books in the history of the world. Not only is it a spiritual monument—an essential scripture of Hinduism, recited daily for two millennia and to this very day, whose teachings have spread throughout Asia and around the globe—it is also a literary masterpiece, the linchpin of a great epic of war and peace, honor and disgrace, loyalty and betrayal. It is a book people everywhere in the world return to again and again throughout their lives for insight into the nature of reality.

For the Hindu philosophers, the Bhagavad Gita was always of great importance. It is one of the three central texts of Vedanta, the other two being the Brahma Sutras and the Upanishads. From the ninth century CE onwards, philosophers such as Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and Nimbarka in the Vedanta tradition, and Abhinavagupta in the Shaiva tradition, wrote learned commentaries on the Gita. It was also translated from Sanskrit into other Indian languages, for example, Jnaneshvara's Marathi version in the thirteenth century. As a work of literature, the epic was immensely important to the cultural life of India and even beyond her shores, notably in Indonesia, where parts were translated into Old Javanese.

It was during the British Raj that the Gita first achieved worldwide fame. Many educated Indians were struggling to defend Hinduism against the onslaught of western culture, and gradually the Gita was considered to embody the essential spirit and deepest truths of Hinduism. The Hindu reformer Ram Mohun Roy referred to the Gita as “the essence of all shastras,” or the essence of all scriptures. By 1912, C. F. Andrews could claim that the Gita had become a common and well-read scripture for the whole of educated India. It also appealed to another, and very different group of people, the Theosophists. It was the Theosophists who introduced the Gita to that most famous of all modern Indians: Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Since Gandhi was introduced to the Gita by the Theosophists, he learned to read it in an allegorical way. The mighty battle was really a struggle for truth—which he saw as another word for God—to be sought through love, and love ruled out violence. Ahimsa, or nonviolence, became the key to Gandhi’s understanding of the Gita, which he called his “spiritual dictionary.” He was particularly fascinated by two words: aparigraha (nonpossession), which suggested the renunciation of money and property to avoid cramping the life of the spirit; and samabhava (equability), which asked him to transcend pain or pleasure, victory or defeat, and to work without hope of success or fear of failure. The Gita became an inspiration to Gandhi and millions of his followers, a manual of devotion and action in the modern world.

The Gita also found a rapt audience in the West, and a fascinating global cross-fertilization followed. It appealed both to the German Romantics, notably Schlegel, Humboldt, and Goethe, and to the American Transcendentalists, a group in New England who thought that insights which transcended

logic and experience would reveal the deepest truths. The Gita was first translated into English in India in 1785 by Charles Wilkins, a merchant with the East India Company, and his translation made a deep impression on the Transcendentalist's leader, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's poem, "Brahma," elegantly captures some of the essence of the Gita:

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
and one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

The poem is based on a verse found in both the Gita and the Katha Upanishad. (A century later, another great poet, T. S. Eliot, also had a lifelong interest in Indian philosophy and incorporated it into his poetry as well.) Emerson made

the Gita required reading for all those who were in rebellion against evangelical Christianity. Thus, for the first time, the Gita became part of a counterculture.

Another Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, was a tremendous enthusiast of the Gita, but his interest was also a practical one. He incorporated a version of the Gita's teaching on Karma Yoga into his own lifestyle and philosophy. In 1849, he launched the idea of civil disobedience—an idea that influenced Gandhi's political thinking. Thus, an Indic idea passed through a Western mind and returned transformed to India. (Similarly, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York City, moved its headquarters to India, and was a catalyst in the revival of Hinduism and Buddhism.) And of course, Gandhi's ideas flowed back westward to inspire two other giants of the twentieth century, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela.

The current tidal wave of interest in the Gita, in Yoga, and in things Indian began in the 1960s with the efflorescence of another counterculture, the paperback revolution in book publishing, the new, far-reaching curricula of a higher educational system undergoing explosive growth, and the arrival in the West of gurus such as Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Satchidananda, and A. C. Bhaktivedanta, all following in the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda.

Today, the Bhagavad Gita is firmly established around the world as a true classic. But not a dusty old classic: It is astonishingly fresh and inspiring, even to readers who do not share the underlying assumptions of the text. Knowledge and self-discipline are still virtues. Selflessness is as sound today as it was then. Doing one's duty regardless of consequences is needed now more than ever. We may not share the Gita's views on caste or endorse the social system it supports, but we don't

have to. We are free to choose, and the Gita offers a number of choices. Its core of universal values and its poetic grandeur make the Gita a living classic.

I mentioned earlier that the Gita is the lynchpin of a great epic, and that epic is the *Mahabharata*, or Great Story of the Bharatas. With nearly one hundred thousand verses divided into eighteen books, it is one of the longest epic poems in the world—fully seven times longer than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined, or three times longer than the Bible. It is in fact a whole library of stories that exerted a tremendous influence on the people and literature of India.

The central story of the *Mahabharata* is a conflict over succession to the throne of Hastinapura, a kingdom just north of modern Delhi that was the ancestral realm of a tribe most commonly known as the Bharatas. (India was at that time divided amongst many small, and often warring, kingdoms.) The struggle is between two groups of cousins, the Pandavas, or sons of Pandu, and the Kauravas, or descendants of Kuru. Because of his blindness, Dhritarashtra, the elder brother of Pandu, is passed over as king, the throne going instead to Pandu. However, Pandu renounces the throne, and Dhritarashtra assumes power after all. The sons of Pandu—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva—grow up together with their cousins, the Kauravas. Due to enmity and jealousy, the Pandavas are forced to leave the kingdom when their father dies. During their exile, they jointly marry Draupadi and befriend their cousin Krishna, who from then on accompanies them. They return and share sovereignty with the Kauravas, but have to withdraw to the forest for thirteen years when Yudhishtira loses all his possessions in a game of dice with Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. When they

return from the forest to demand their share of the kingdom back, Duryodhana refuses. This means war. Krishna acts as counselor to the Pandavas. The Gita is found right here, with the two armies facing each other and ready for battle. The battle rages for eighteen days and ends with the defeat of the Kauravas. All the Kauravas die; only the five Pandava brothers and Krishna survive. The six set out for heaven together, but all die on the way, except Yudhishtira, who reaches the gates of heaven accompanied only by a small dog, who turns out to be an incarnation of the god Dharma. After tests of faithfulness and constancy, Yudhishtira is reunited in heaven with his brothers and Draupadi in eternal bliss.

It is within this enormous epic—the sizable book you hold in your hands is well less than one percent of the *Mahabharata* that we find the Bhagavad Gita, or the Song of the Lord, most commonly referred to simply as the Gita. It is found in the sixth book of the epic, just before the great battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The greatest hero of the Pandavas, Arjuna, has pulled up his chariot in the middle of the battlefield between the two opposing armies. He is accompanied by Krishna, who acts as his charioteer. In a fit of despondency, Arjuna throws down his bow and refuses to fight, deplored the immorality of the coming war. It is a moment of supreme drama: time stands still, the armies are frozen in place, and God speaks.

The situation is extremely grave. A great kingdom is about to self-destruct in internecine warfare, making a mockery of dharma, the eternal moral laws and customs that govern the universe. Arjuna's objections are well founded: He is the victim of a moral paradox. On the one hand, he is facing persons who, according to dharma, deserve his respect and veneration. On the other hand, his duty as a warrior demands that he kill them.

Yet no fruits of victory would seem to justify such a heinous crime. It is, seemingly, a dilemma without solution. It is this state of moral confusion that the Gita sets out to mend.

When Arjuna refuses to fight, Krishna has no patience with him. Only when he realizes the extent of Arjuna's despondency does Krishna change his attitude and start teaching the mysteries of dharmic action in this world. He introduces Arjuna to the structure of the universe, the concepts of prakriti, primordial nature, and the three gunas, the properties that are active in prakriti. Then he takes Arjuna on a tour of philosophical ideas and ways of salvation. He discusses the nature of theory and action, the importance of ritual, the ultimate principle, Brahman, all the while gradually disclosing his own nature as the highest god. This part of the Gita culminates in an overwhelming vision: Krishna allows Arjuna to see his supernal form, the Vishvarupa, which strikes terror into Arjuna's heart. The rest of the Gita deepens and supplements the ideas presented before the epiphany—the importance of self-control and faith, of equanimity and unselfishness, but above all, of bhakti, or devotion. Krishna explains to Arjuna how he can obtain immortality by transcending the properties which qualify not only primordial matter, but also human character and behavior. Krishna also emphasizes the importance of doing one's duty, declaring that it is better to do one's own duty without distinction than to do another's duty well. In the end, Arjuna is convinced. He picks up his bow and is ready to fight.

Knowing a couple of things will make your reading easier. The first is that the Gita is a conversation within a conversation. Dhritarashtra begins it by asking a question, and that is the last we hear out of him. He is answered by Sanjaya, who

relates what is happening on the battlefield. (It is actually more dramatic and wondrous than the previous sentence indicates. Dhritarashtra is blind. Vyasa, his father, offers to restore his sight so he can follow the battle. Dhritarashtra declines this boon, feeling that seeing the carnage of his kinsmen would be more than he could bear. So instead, Vyasa bestows clairvoyance and clairaudience upon Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra's minister and charioteer. As they sit in their palace, Sanjaya relates what he sees and hears on the distant battlefield.) Sanjaya pops up now and again throughout the book as he relates to Dhritarashtra the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. This second conversation is a bit one-sided, as Krishna does almost all of the talking. Thus, Sanjaya describes the situation, Arjuna asks the questions, and Krishna gives the answers.

The second thing to be aware of is the profusion of nicknames, also known as epithets. Almost all other translations either omit them or normalize them for simplicity's sake. Thus, Hrishikesha, Keshava, Govinda, and many other names will be left out or just translated as Krishna, and Son of Pritha, Son of Kunti, Mighty-armed Prince, Bharata, and many other epithets will be omitted or reduced to Arjuna. To maintain fidelity to the original, I am retaining all of them. They also make the text more flavorful and interesting, provide insight into Indian culture, and indeed into the story itself. For example, Krishna uses epithets of Arjuna that remind him of his royal lineage, his prowess in battle, and so on, to ease his dejection. They are also meaningful to our Indian readers. If you find them confusing, please turn to the back of the book, where you will find a comprehensive glossary explaining all the names and nicknames. Many of these names are still in use, so you may well find some of your friends and acquaintances listed there.

Unfortunately, one thing I cannot do to make your reading easier is completely explain everything in the Gita. That would be beyond the scope of an introduction, or even an entire book. For devotees and scholars alike, the Gita—and all the questions it raises—can absorb a lifetime of study. The YogaVidya.com web site lists dozens of books for further reading. I can, however, alert you to one fact about the Gita that will save you a lot of anguish and frustration: It contradicts itself. This was recognized early on and was cited by Shankara as the reason for writing his commentary.

Many explanations have been put forward to explain how theism, asceticism, dualism, pantheism, pragmatic materialism, Yoga, Vedanta, and even Buddhism, all got woven into the text. One is that, at the time the Gita was written, the various systems of philosophy were not yet rigid and standardized, nor conceived of as being mutually exclusive. Another is that it is a work of mysticism and devotion, and is not intended to be logical or systematic. Another is that the text has the practical aim of salvation and is content to tolerantly lay out a variety of options. A variation on this view is that the options are graded according to simplicity or difficulty, with the way of knowledge being the most difficult and the way of devotion being the simplest and most efficient. Still another is to assign a hierarchy of truths to the statements in the Gita, so that some tell a simple truth and others reveal a higher truth. It should be noted that we still live with intellectual inconsistencies and levels of truth even in the modern world. For instance, we simultaneously believe in and utilize the classical mechanics of Newton and the relativity theory of Einstein. Both theories are true at the same time, but not on the same level. The inconsistencies of the Gita may

have been as undisturbing to the ancients as the inconsistencies in our own theories of reality are to us.

Who would've written such a complicated book? Indian tradition holds that the entire *Mahabharata* was written by Vyasa, and many traditional pandits still hold this view. Modern scholarship has arrived at a more complex answer: There is no single author or single date of composition, and it began as oral poetry. A reciter would have had to know the story, but his reputation depended upon his skill in bringing the traditional material to life. Then as now, a first-class narrator was much in demand. We know from other oral-poetry traditions that the same bard would present the same story in different versions, longer or shorter as it suited the occasion. Thus, in its oral form, the epic had a reasonably fixed core, but its performance was highly flexible, with additions, embellishments, and digressions made on the spot to please the audience. In addition, oral poets had at their disposal a large number of formulaic expressions that could be easily fitted into the epic's sixteen-syllable meter in which the length of only a few syllables was fixed. The original nucleus of the epic may have been the creation of a single bard, or possibly a small group of bards, but it is now irrecoverable. It is likely to have been substantially shorter than the *Mahabharata*'s shortest recorded version of twenty-four thousand verses, although we shouldn't underestimate the ability of oral cultures to produce very long texts.

An educated guess would suggest that the origin of the *Mahabharata* lies sometime during the eighth or ninth centuries BCE, although some scholars consider the roots of the epic to be much older. Among the specialists, there is now general agreement that the oldest portions of the epic that have been preserved are not likely to be older than 400 BCE. On the other end, it is

difficult to fix an upper limit for the *Mahabharata*'s composition. The didactic portions of the twelfth book in particular seem to have been added very late, perhaps in the fourth century CE.

Looking more specifically at the Gita, most scholars think the oldest parts may go back to the third century BCE, whereas the theistic portions may stem from the middle or end of the second century BCE. Chapters twelve through fifteen may date from the first century CE, whereas chapter seventeen is possibly even younger. The Gita was likely composed somewhere in north-central India, perhaps in modern Haryana or western Uttar Pradesh. These conclusions would probably hold good whether we believe that the Gita was a work originally separate from the *Mahabharata*, as some claim, or that it was originally part of the great epic. Even if the Gita was not originally a single unit or part of the epic, it has by now been handed down and read that way for many centuries.

We don't know when the *Mahabharata* was first written down. Possibly it was a gradual process, where parts of the epic were put into manuscripts, whereas other parts were still transmitted orally. Whenever the process started, there were only two possibilities: in the north, birch bark was used; and in the south, palm leaves. These are brittle materials, and frequent recopying was required if the text wasn't to be lost. The earliest surviving manuscript is from the ninth century CE. An owner of a manuscript could do with it as he pleased, and books consisting of leaves bound together with string allow other leaves to be easily inserted. The quality of the copying varied with the scribe—a bad scribe might make errors, and a better scribe might subsequently improve the text. All these processes created a lack of consistency, so we should not be surprised at the great variety amongst the different versions, or recensions, of the text.

The Gita first rolled off a printing press before there were complete editions of the *Mahabharata* itself. As noted earlier, it was translated into English for the first time in 1785 by Charles Wilkins. The first Sanskrit edition came out in 1806 under the supervision of Sir William Jones. In 1823, the German scholar August Wilhelm von Schlegel produced a first-class edition of the Gita and added a Latin translation. The first printed edition of the *Mahabharata* was the so-called Calcutta edition, completed in 1839, which was based on the Bengali recension of the text. The next attempt was the Bombay edition, largely based on the recension in Devanagari script and completed in 1863. The Kumbhakonam edition of 1910 incorporated the southern recension.

This situation was clearly less than satisfactory, so one of the greatest scholarly undertakings of the twentieth century was begun in 1919 at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona (now spelled Pune). No less than ten distinguished editors, initially led by V. S. Sukthankar, and a host of assistants labored for forty-seven years to produce the definitive edition of the *Mahabharata*. The objective was to reconstruct the oldest possible form of the text on the basis of hundreds of manuscripts collected from all over the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia. The resulting set of nineteen volumes, containing thirteen thousand pages, was completed in 1966. I am very pleased that the Institute granted us permission to include their definitive Sanskrit edition of the Gita in this book, and we have taken great pains to present it to you in the beautiful Devanagari script—an extremely rare event outside of India. I would also like to thank Dr. John Smith, who has made an electronic text of the *Mahabharata* available on the Internet.

The situation regarding English translations today is also less than satisfactory—in fact, quite surprisingly so, given that the Gita has been translated into English literally hundreds of times over the last two centuries. The publisher of YogaVidya.com carefully examined more than a dozen of the most highly regarded translations with an eye toward reissuing the best one. Instead, he found them astonishingly deficient. Some stayed so close to the Indic syntax that they were unreadable in English. Others strayed so far from the original text that they were merely unreliable paraphrases. Still others suffered from ugly transliteration or amateur versification. Some others were distorted by the beliefs or egoism of the translator. And yet others were deformed by their publishers' marketing departments, always on the lookout for new hooks and angles.

So the publisher asked me to have a go at it, and I have tried my best to sidestep these shortcomings and avoid introducing new ones. I made great efforts to produce a translation that is both highly accurate and true to the original Sanskrit. I refrained from using verse, since that would militate against the objective of accuracy. As previously mentioned, unlike almost all other translations, all the names and epithets have been retained. If the phrasing in a particular sentence strikes you as strained or odd, more often than not it is from attempting to stay true to the original. I did not gloss over the inconsistencies and difficulties in the Gita, nor did I cover up uncomfortable topics such as sacrifices, caste, sexism, and the morality of war. (Although usually read as the story of a man seeking insight and salvation, the Gita can also be read as the story of a man with a conscience being taught to forget it.) And when questions arose, I consulted both Shankara's and Ramanuja's commentaries. At the same time, I sweated over every word,

phrase, and punctuation mark to make the translation as clear and smooth as possible, using up-to-date terminology and international standard written English. Finally, I dispensed with footnotes so that you could relish this great work of literature without interruptions. Again, consult the bibliography online if you wish to delve deeper into the philosophical issues in the Gita.

Now for some specifics. The Indic conceptual system is very different from the Western system: It is often well-nigh impossible to find English terms that are semantically coextensive with the Indic terms. All translations of Sanskrit philosophical terms are therefore approximations, and many are disputed. Moreover, the exact meaning of a word is also determined by the philosophical and religious context in which it is used. Although other translators have made other choices in some instances, I have chosen to translate jnana with knowledge, vijnana with discrimination, and vidya with wisdom or science, depending upon context. I have chosen to translate the term guna with property, which I believe gives a better meaning than the often-used quality or constituent. Since sattva causes illumination because of its purity, I have chosen to translate the term with clarity rather than purity or goodness. Rajas, often translated as passion, I have translated as agitation in order to better bring out the physical aspect of the term. As for tamas, I have chosen sluggishness, again to emphasize the physical aspect. I have translated siddhas as perfected ones and karma mostly as action. However, karma has become an English loanword meaning “consequence of action.” Where I found this to be the meaning, I have rendered karma as karma.

I have chosen to keep the Indic term Brahman even though it is not a normal loanword in English. The reason is that we

don't have any word that really comes close to Brahman. The German scholar Paul Hacker sees it as primeval matter, but this in my opinion brings it too close to prakriti, which I have translated as primordial nature. Primeval energy may be better, but is not entirely satisfactory either: the immovable pole star, for instance, is identified with the unchanging Brahman. In the Vedas, Brahman relates especially to the power inherent in the mantras. A later text, the *Hiranyakeshi Grihyasutra*, says it is the navel of the universe and the navel of the pranas (breaths). Generally, Brahman stands for the Absolute, the source of everything, and is sometimes understood as a nonconscious principle, and sometimes as a conscious one, or God. The term, quite simply, can be interpreted many ways. I have therefore preferred to give this brief explanation of the term Brahman rather than translate it. Its adjectival form is Brahmic.

The word Yoga in various forms occurs almost one hundred and fifty times in the Gita. It is a complex term, and allows for a number of different interpretations, all dependent upon the context. The basic meaning is yoke—Yoga is in fact etymologically related to the English word yoke—but through various metaphorical processes the word came to cover a much wider semantic field. The Gita predates by a few centuries classical Yoga as we know it today, so in the Gita the word Yoga most often means simply mental discipline, or just discipline or training, while a yogi is a master of such discipline. It also refers to more specific forms of discipline, such as Karma Yoga (which I translated as the discipline of action) and Bhakti Yoga (translated as the discipline of devotion), and to creative or magical power. In the colophons, Yoga means a reflection or meditation upon a given subject.

In the end, a translation is always an interpretation, but an interpretation is not always a translation. The only way to get a truly intimate understanding of a Sanskrit text is to learn Sanskrit. Just by the way, although its concepts can be slippery and elusive, the vocabulary and grammar of the Gita are actually quite straightforward. If you were to learn Sanskrit, you could read the Gita in the original quite early in your studies. That is one very important reason why we included the Sanskrit in this book.

You may be interested to know that each chapter of the Gita was originally untitled. We have followed the traditional practice of pulling chapter titles from the colophons, those delightfully flowery sentences that bring each chapter to a satisfying close. Each and every chapter title could have begun with “The Yoga of” but we omitted this phrase to avoid excessive repetition and confusing constructions. We also took the opportunity to shorten and simplify the colophons, which can be very long and highly complex.

Finally, casting aside for a moment the historical conundrums, the scholarly debates, and the technical minutia, just know one thing: You are about to read one of the world’s truly great books. It is essential reading for a nontrivial understanding of Hinduism, of India, and indeed of life itself. The Bhagavad Gita still speaks to people everywhere—across the oceans, across the millennia, and across the boundaries of language, religion, and culture.

प्रथमोऽध्यायः

Chapter One

Arjuna's Despair

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच ।
धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।
मामकाः पाण्डवाश्वैव किमकुर्वत संजय ॥ १

Dhritarashtra said, “When my troops and the sons of Pandu, eager to fight, were arrayed on the Kuru field, the field of law, what did they do, Sanjaya?”

संजय उवाच ।
दृष्टा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूहं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।
आचार्यमुपसंगम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ २

Sanjaya said, “When Duryodhana, the king, saw the army of the Pandu sons assembled, he went to his teacher and spoke these words.

पश्यैतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।
व्यूहां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥ ३

‘Look at this huge army of the Pandu sons, teacher, arrayed for battle by the son of Drupada, that brilliant student of yours.

अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा भीमार्जुनसमा युधि ।
युयुधानो विराटश्च द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥ 4
धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान् ।
पुरुजित्कुन्तिभोजश्च शैव्यश्च नरपुंगवः ॥ 5
युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त उत्तमौजाश्च वीर्यवान् ।
सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्व एव महारथः ॥ 6

Here are the heroes, the great archers, the equals of Bhima and Arjuna in battle: Yuyudhana, Virata, and the great warrior Drupada; Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana, and the heroic king of Kashi; Purujit, Kuntibhoja, and Shaibya, bull among men; Yudhamanyu the bold and the heroic Uttamaujas; Saubhadra and the sons of Drupada—all of them great warriors.

अस्माकं तु विशिष्टा ये तान्निबोध द्विजोत्तम ।
नायका मम सैन्यस्य संज्ञार्थं तान्ब्रवीमि ते ॥ 7

But, best of Brahmins, hear about our superior men, the leaders of my army. I will mention them by name.

भवान्भीष्मश्च कर्णश्च कृपश्च समितिंजयः ।
अश्वत्थामा विकर्णश्च सौमदत्तिस्तथैव च ॥ 8
अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थं त्यक्तजीविताः ।
नानाशस्त्रप्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥ 9

You yourself, Bhishma, Karna, and Kripa, victor in battle; Ashvatthaman, Vikarna, as well as the son of Somadatta, and many other heroes willing to sacrifice their lives for my sake, all battle-hardened wielders of many kinds of weapons.

अपर्यासं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम् ।
पर्यासं त्विदमेतेषां बलं भीमाभिरक्षितम् ॥ 10

That force, protected by Bhima, is not a match for us, but this force, protected by Bhishma, is a match for them.

अयनेषु च सर्वेषु यथाभागमवस्थिताः ।
भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्वं एव हि ॥ 11

Indeed, it is Bhishma you must all protect along all avenues of approach as you man your respective positions.'

तस्य संजनयन्हर्षं कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः ।
सिंहनादं विनद्योऽच्चैः शङ्खं दध्मौ प्रतापवान् ॥ 12

In order to encourage him, grandfather, the majestic Kuru elder roared his lion's roar and blew his conch.

ततः शङ्खाश्च भेर्यश्च पणवानकगोमुखाः ।
सहस्रैवाभ्यहन्यन्त स शब्दस्तुमुलोऽभवत् ॥ 13

Then, all of a sudden, the conches, kettledrums, cymbals, big drums, and horns were sounded: It was a tumultuous noise.

ततः श्वेतैर्हयैर्युक्ते महति स्यन्दने स्थितौ ।
माधवः पाण्डवश्चैव दिव्यौ शङ्खौ प्रदध्मतुः ॥ 14

And standing on their great chariot yoked with white horses, Madhava and the son of Pandu blew their divine conches.

पाञ्चजन्यं हृषीकेशो देवदत्तं धनंजयः ।
पौण्ड्रं दध्मौ महाशङ्खं भीमकर्मा वृकोटरः ॥ 15

Hrishikesha blew his Pancajanya, Dhananjaya his Devadatta,
and Wolf Belly of terrible deeds blew the great conch Paundra.

अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तीपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः ।
नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥ 16

King Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, blew his Anantavijaya;
Nakula and Sahadeva, their Sughosha and Manipushpaka.

काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः ।
धृष्टद्युम्नो विराटश्च सात्यकिक्षापराजितः ॥ 17
द्रूपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते ।
सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्खान्दध्मुः पृथक्पृथक् ॥ 18

The Kashi king, the great archer, and the great warrior,
Shikhandi; Dhrishtadyumna and Virata and the undefeated
Satyaki; Drupada and the sons of Drupada: All together,
O Lord of the Earth, as well as the mighty-armed Saubhadra,
blew their conches—each and every one.

स घोषो धार्तराष्ट्राणां हृदयानि व्यदारयत् ।
न भश्च पृथिवीं चैव तु मुलो व्यनुनादयन् ॥ 19

This thundering sound rent the hearts of the sons of
Dhritarashtra, resounding through earth and sky.

अथ व्यवस्थितान्दृष्टा धार्तराष्ट्रान्कपिध्वजः ।

प्रवृत्ते शस्त्रसंपाते धनुरुद्घम्य पाण्डवः ॥ 20
 हृषीकेशं तदा वाक्यमिदमाह महीपते ।
 सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये रथं स्थापय मेऽच्युत ॥ 21
 यावदेतान्निरीक्षेऽहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् ।
 कैर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन्नणसमुद्यमे ॥ 22

Then the ape-bannered son of Pandu, seeing the sons of Dhritarashtra lined up, lifted his bow as the clash of arms began and spoke these words to Hrishikesha, O Lord of the Earth: 'Achyuta, station my chariot between the two armies, so that I may observe these men, standing eager for battle, with whom I must fight in this strenuous engagement.

योत्यमानानवेक्षेऽहं य एतेऽत्र समागताः ।
 धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धियुद्धि प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥ 23

I see these men who have assembled here, ready to fight, wanting to please the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra in battle.'

एवमुक्तो हृषीकेशो गुडाकेशेन भारत ।
 सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये स्थापयित्वा रथोत्तमम् ॥ 24
 भीष्मद्रोणप्रमुखतः सर्वेषां च महीक्षिताम् ।
 उवाच पार्थं पश्यैतान्सपवेतान्कुरुनिति ॥ 25

When Gudakesha had spoken to him thus, O Bharata, Hrishikesha stationed their splendid chariot between the two armies, right in front of Bhishma, Drona, and all the kings and said, 'Son of Pritha, behold these Kurus assembled.'

तत्रापश्यस्थितान्पार्थः पितृनथं पितामहान् ।
आचार्यान्मातुलान्प्रातृन्पुत्रान्पौत्रान्सखींस्तथा ॥ 26
श्वशुरान्सुहृदश्चैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि ।
तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान्बन्धूनवस्थितान् ॥ 27
कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।
दृष्टवेमान्स्वजनान्कृष्णं युयुत्सून्समवस्थितान् ॥ 28
सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति ।
वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ 29

There the son of Pritha saw standing fathers and grandfathers, as well as teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, fathers-in-law, and even allies in both armies. When the son of Kunti had seen them, all these relatives arrayed, he was overcome with the greatest compassion, deeply saddened, and said this: 'When I see my family willing and ready to fight, Krishna, my limbs falter, my mouth goes dry. There is a trembling in my body and my hairs bristle.

गाण्डीवं संसते हस्तान्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते ।
न च शङ्कोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥ 30

Gandiva slips from my hand, and as for my skin, it burns. I cannot stand firm, and my mind seems to whirl.

निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव ।
न च श्रेयोऽनुपश्यामि हत्वा स्वजनमाहवे ॥ 31

I see inauspicious portents, Keshava, and I see nothing good achieved by killing my family in battle.

न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च ।
किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा ॥ 32

I don't desire victory, Krishna, nor a kingdom or pleasures.
What use is a kingdom to me, Govinda? What is enjoyment
or life?

येषामर्थे काङ्क्षितं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च ।
त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च ॥ 33

For precisely those for whose sake we desire a kingdom,
enjoyment, and pleasures are standing in line to battle against
us, giving up their lives and riches.

आचार्याः पितरः पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहाः ।
मातुलाः श्वशुराः पौत्राः स्यालाः संबन्धिनस्तथा ॥ 34
एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि द्वितोऽपि मधुसूदन ।
अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते ॥ 35

Teachers, fathers, sons, yes, even grandfathers, uncles,
fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other
kinsmen—these I don't want to kill, even if they kill us,
Madhusudana, even for the kingdom of the three worlds,
and even less for the earth.

निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्नः का प्रीतिः स्याज्ञनार्दन ।
पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान्हत्वैतानाततायिनः ॥ 36

What joy would we gain, Janardana, by killing the sons of
Dhritarashtra? Only evil would accrue to us by killing
these malefactors.

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान्सबान्धवान् ।
स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥ 37

Therefore, we must not kill the sons of Dhritarashtra and our kinsmen. How could we become happy by killing our family?

यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः ।
कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रदोहे च पातकम् ॥ 38
कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निवर्तितुम् ।
कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्विर्जनार्दन ॥ 39

Even if they, their minds seduced by greed, do not see the wickedness of destroying the family and the crime in betraying their friends, how could we fail to know that we should turn away from this evil, we who see the wickedness of destroying the family, Janardana?

कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः ।
धर्मे न एते कुलं कृत्स्नमधर्मोऽभिभवत्युत ॥ 40

When the family is destroyed, the eternal family laws are lost, and when the law is lost, lawlessness overwhelms the whole family.

अधर्माभिभवाकृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः ।
स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु वार्ष्ण्यं जायते वर्णसंकरः ॥ 41
संकरो नरकायैव कुलद्वानां कुलस्य च ।
पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्तपिण्डोटकक्रियाः ॥ 42

Because lawlessness prevails, Krishna, the women of the family become corrupted. When the women are corrupted, Son of Vrishni, the classes get confused, a confusion leading to hell for family and family killers. For their fathers fall, deprived of their offerings of rice balls and water.

दोषैरेतैः कुलघ्नानां वर्णसंकरकारकैः ।
उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्मश्च शाश्वताः ॥ 43

Because of these transgressions of the family killers which cause confusion of the classes, the eternal caste laws and family laws are set aside.

उत्सन्नकुलधर्मणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दन ।
नरके नियतं वासो भवतीयनुशुश्रुम ॥ 44

We have heard, Janardana, that a place in hell is guaranteed for men who have set aside their family laws.

अहो बत महत्पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयम् ।
यद्राज्यसुखलोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥ 45

Alas! We have decided to do great evil, because we are ready to kill our family out of greed for the pleasures of a kingdom.

यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।
धार्तराष्ट्र रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥ 46

If the sons of Dhritarashtra, weapons in hand, were to kill me in battle, unresisting and unarmed, that would be better for me.'

एवमुक्त्वार्जुनः संख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।
विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्रहमानसः ॥ 47

With these words, Arjuna let go of his bow and arrows in the midst of battle and sank down in his chariot, his mind tormented by sorrow.”

इति श्रीमहाभारते शतसाहस्रायां संहितायां श्रीमद्भगवन्नीतायां ब्रह्मविद्या-
शास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादे अर्जुनविषादयोगो नाम प्रथमोऽध्यायः ॥

Thus ends the first chapter, entitled “The Reflection upon Arjuna’s Despair,” in the instruction which teaches the sacred knowledge given by the exalted Krishna in his conversation with Arjuna, the auspicious Bhagavad Gita, which is in the work of a hundred thousand verses, the glorious *Mahabharata*.

द्वितीयोऽध्यायः

Chapter Two

Theory

संजय उवाच ।

तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रूपूर्णकुलेक्षणम् ।
विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः ॥ 1

Sanjaya said, “Thus overcome with compassion, his eyes filled with tears in despair, Madhusudana spoke to him.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।
अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥ 2

The Lord said, ‘Why has this foul delusion come over you in this critical hour, Arjuna? It is ignoble, it doesn’t lead to heaven, and it is disgraceful.

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वयुपपद्यते ।
क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परंतप ॥ 3

Do not succumb to cowardice, Son of Pritha. This is unworthy of you. Shake off this petty faintness of heart. Stand up, Scorcher of Enemies!’

अर्जुन उवाच ।
कथं भीष्ममहं संख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदनं ।
इषुभिः प्रतियोत्स्यामि पूजार्हावरिसूदनं ॥ 4

Arjuna said, 'How can I fight with arrows against Bhishma and Drona in battle, Madhusudana? They are worthy of homage, Enemy Slayer.

गुरुनहत्वा हि महानुभावात्श्रेयो भोक्तुं भैक्षमपीह लोके ।
हत्वार्थकामांस्तु गुरुनिहैव भुञ्जीय भोगानुधिरपटिग्धान् ॥ 5

It is better to eat beggars' food here in this world than to kill teachers of great honor. If I were to kill my teachers, who are greedy for wealth here, I would enjoy pleasures smeared with blood.

न चैतद्विद्यः कतरन्नो गरीयो यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषामस्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥ 6

Nor do we know what is better for us, whether we win or lose. The sons of Dhritarashtra are arrayed before us. If we kill them, we shall not wish to live.

कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसंमूढचेताः ।
यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥ 7

My deepest nature has been stricken by the error of compassion. With a mind confused about the law, I ask you what would be best. Tell me this for sure. I am your student. Teach me as I seek refuge in you.

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद्यच्छोकमुच्छलोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥ 8

For I see nothing that would dispel this sorrow of mine which desiccates my senses, even if on earth I obtained unrivaled wealth, a kingdom, yes, even sovereignty over the gods!””

संजय उवाच ।
एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परंतप ।
न योत्थ्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥ 9

Sanjaya said, “O Scorcher of Enemies, after Gudakesha said this to Hrishikesha, he added, ‘I will not fight,’ and then fell silent.

तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।
सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषेदन्तमिदं वचः ॥ 10

With a hint of derision, O Bharata, Hrishikesha spoke these words to him as he sat despairing between the two armies.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।
गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥ 11

The Lord said, ‘You sorrow over men you should not be sorry for, yet you address issues of learning? Wise men grieve neither for the dead nor for the living.

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।
न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥ 12

Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor these lords of men, and never shall any of us cease to exist hereafter.

देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥ 13

Just as the embodied self passes through childhood, youth, and old age in this body, in the same manner, it will obtain another body. A wise man is not confused about this.

मात्रास्पर्शस्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तास्तिक्षस्व भारत ॥ 14

Contacts with the elements, Son of Kunti, are the source of cold, heat, pleasure, and pain. They come and go eternally. Endure them, Bharata!

यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।
समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ 15

The man whom they do not trouble, O Bull Among Men, the wise man for whom pain and pleasure are the same: He is fit for immortality.

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।
उभयोरपि दृष्टेऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥ 16

There is no becoming from the nonexistent, nor any unbecoming from the existent. The boundary between these two has been perceived by those who see the basic principles.

अविनाशि तु तद्वद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥ 17

Know that this, on which all the world has been strung, is indestructible. No one can bring about the destruction of this imperishable being.

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।
अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥ 18

It is these bodies of the embodied, eternal, imperishable, and unfathomable self which come to an end. Therefore fight, Bharata!

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्छैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ 19

He who thinks the embodied self is a slayer, and he who imagines it is slain—neither of these understand. It does not slay, nor is it slain.

न जायते प्रियते वा कदाचिन्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ 20

It is never born and it never dies, nor will it come to life again when it has ceased to be. It is unborn, eternal, constant, and ancient. It is not slain when the body is slain.

वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम् ।
कथं स पुरुषः पार्थं कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥ 21

How does the man who knows this indestructible, eternal, unborn, and imperishable principle, Son of Pritha, have anybody killed, or kill anybody?

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति न गेऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ 22

Like a man who has cast off his old clothes puts on others that are new, thus the embodied self casts off old bodies and moves on to others that are new.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ 23

Weapons do not cut it, fire does not burn it, water does not wet it, wind does not parch it.

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Names and Nicknames

Achyuta Krishna. Means “unfallen, firm.” Used as a name for Krishna in the Gita, but also used for others in the *Mahabharata*.

Aditya The sun.

Adityas A class of gods who are the sons of Aditi and Kashyapa. There are twelve of them, of whom Vishnu is the most important.

Agni The god of fire.

Airavata Indra’s elephant.

Ananta One of the three kings of the serpents; the other two are Vasuki and Takshaka. Means “the infinite.” Also known as Shesha.

Anantavijaya Yudhishtira’s conch shell.

Arjuna The great archer and renowned hero of the *Mahabharata*. He is one of the five Pandu brothers (the Pandavas) who fight their evil Kuru cousins (the Kauravas) for the kingdom of Hastinapura. Arjuna is reputedly a son of Pandu by Kunti. However, Pandu lived apart from Kunti because of a curse, and Kunti had Arjuna by the god Indra.

Aryaman One of the Adityas.

Ashvattha The holy fig tree; also called the bo or pipal tree.

Ashvatthaman The son of Drona and Kripa. An elephant of the same name was killed during the battle to make Drona believe that his son had been killed.

Ashvins Ancient India’s divine twins. They are the surgeons to the gods. Because of their beauty, they are often used in comparisons.

Asita Devala A seer. Also known as just Asita or Devala.

Best of the Bharatas Arjuna.

Best of the Kurus Arjuna. Although primarily a Pandava, he is also a Kaurava.

Bharata In the Gita, Arjuna and Dhritarashtra. In the plural, the descendants of Bharata.

Bhima One of the five Pandu brothers, also called Bhimasena. He is the son of Kunti and the reputed son of Pandu, but really the son of Vayu.

Bhishma The son of Shantanu and the river Ganges. He is a master of statecraft, and a great warrior fighting for the Kauravas.

Bhrigu A seer.

Brahma The creator god, the demiurge who fashions the world.

See also Vishnu.

Brahma Sutras A work dealing with the knowledge of Brahman. One of the three central texts of Vedanta philosophy, the other two being the Upanishads and the Gita itself.

Brahman The primordial principle or shapeless substance of which the universe is made, and to which it returns.

Brahmic Brahman-related, sacred, or holy.

Brihaspati The priest (*purohita*) of the gods, and also the planet Jupiter.

Bull Among Men In the Gita, Arjuna and Shaibya.

Bull of the Bharatas Arjuna.

Chekitana A warrior of the Vrishni tribe.

Chitraratha The king of the Gandharvas.

Cow of Plenty A cow that belongs to the sage Vasishtha. She was produced by the churning of the Milk Ocean and is supposed to grant all wishes. Also the mother of all cows and a symbol of fertility.

Devadatta Arjuna's conch shell.

Dhananjaya Arjuna. Means "winner of wealth."

Dhrishtadyumna A warrior, and the son of Drupada. Killed by Ashvatthaman.

Dhrishtaketu The king of Chedi.

Dhritarashtra The brother of Pandu and Vidura. Born blind, he is the husband of Gandhari and the father of one hundred sons, the Kauravas. His eldest son is Duryodhana, whom the Pandavas fight against.

Draupadi The wife of the Pandavas.

Drona The military preceptor of both the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and the general of the Kauravas.

Drupada The king of Panchala and the father of Draupadi.

Duryodhana The eldest son of Dhritarashtra and the leader of the Kauravas.

Enemy Slayer Krishna.

Gandharvas Celestial musicians and singers in Indra's heaven.

Gandiva Arjuna's bow.

Ganges The holiest river of India.

Garuda A mythical bird and the mount of Vishnu.

Gayatri A poetic meter. It is also a specific verse in the Rigveda which every orthodox Brahmin must repeat at his morning and evening devotions.

Govinda Krishna. Means "protector of cows."

Gudakesha Arjuna. Means "thick-haired."

Hari Vishnu.

Hero of the Kurus Arjuna. Although primarily a Pandava, he is also a Kaurava.

Himalayas The world's highest mountains, located between India and Tibet. Means "place of snow."

Hrishikesha Krishna. Means "bristling-haired."

Ikshvaku A son of Manu Vaivasvata, he was the first king of the solar dynasty of Ayodhya.

Indra The king of the gods.

Jahnu An ancient king and sage. When the Ganges was brought down from heaven, it was forced to flow over the earth to the ocean and thence descend to the netherworld. In its course, it inundated the sacrificial ground of Jahnu, who drank up its waters but consented to discharge them from his ears. Hence the river Ganges is regarded as his daughter and called Jahnavi.

Janaka A king of Videha or Mithila.

Janardana Krishna.

Jayadratha A king fighting on the Kauravas' side.

Joy of the Kurus Arjuna. Although primarily a Pandava, he is also a Kaurava.

Kandarpa The god of love, also known as Kama or Kamadeva.

Kapila An ancient sage (identified by some with Vishnu and considered the founder of Sankhya).

Karna The king of Anga and the elder brother on his mother's side of the Pandu princes. He was the son of the sun god Surya by Kunti before her marriage to Pandu. Afraid of the censure of her relatives, Kunti abandoned the child in a river, where he was found by a charioteer named Adhiratha and nurtured by his wife Radha. Hence, Karna is sometimes called Sutaputra or Sutaja (son of a charioteer).

Kashi The holiest city in India, it sits on the banks of the Ganges in modern Uttar Pradesh. Also called Banaras or Varanasi.

Kauravas Descendants of Kuru. The term primarily refers to the sons of Dhritarashtra, who are the enemies of the Pandavas. However, the Pandavas are also, strictly speaking, Kauravas, since they all descend from Kuru.

Keshava Krishna.

Keshin A demon.

Kripa A son of Sharadvat, reared by Shantanu.

Krishna Arjuna's charioteer and an incarnation (avatar) of Vishnu.

Kunti The first of Pandu's two wives. Kunti was the daughter of a Yadava prince who let the childless Kuntibhoja adopt her. After receiving a charm from a sage, which enabled her to have children by any god she chose, her sons Yudhishtira, Bhima, and Arjuna were fathered by the gods Dharma, Vayu, and Indra respectively.

Kuntibhoja A Yadava prince who adopted Kunti.

Kuru The ancestor of the Kurus, a tribe. Also the name of their country, and the field on which the great battle is fought. Both the Kauravas proper and the Pandavas descend from Kuru. Technically, they are all Kauravas, but the term is only used for the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, whereas the others are referred to as Pandavas.

Lord of the Earth Dhritarashtra. This is a general term for a king, but it is used twice for Dhritarashtra in the Gita.

Lord of Yoga Krishna.

Lotus Eyed Krishna.

Madhava Krishna.

Madhusudana Krishna. Means "destroyer of [the demon] Madhu."

Manipushpaka The conch shell of Sahadeva, one of the five Pandavas.

Manu In the Vedas, man par excellence, the representative man, and the father of the human race. In later mythology, the name Manu is especially applied to fourteen successive mythical progenitors and sovereigns of the earth, the seventh of which is Manu Vaivasvata,

mentioned in verse 4.1. In verse 32.6, the four Manus are related to the four yugas, or ages of the world.

Margashirsha In the Hindu calendar, the month in which the full moon enters the constellation Mrigashiras. It corresponds to November-December in the Western calendar.

Marici A seer.

Maruts The storm gods, who are companions of Indra.

Meru A fabulous mountain, said to form the central point of the earth. It is surrounded by seven continents interspersed with oceans. Brahma resides on its summit.

Mighty-armed Prince In the Gita, Krishna or Arjuna. A generic epithet for warriors.

Nakula The twin brother of Sahadeva and half-brother of Arjuna, Bhima, and Yudhishtira. He is the fourth of the Pandu princes and the son of Madri, Pandu's second wife, and reputedly Pandu, but actually was the son of the Ashvins.

Narada A seer. In later mythology, he is a friend of Krishna and regarded as the inventor of the vina, or lute. In epic poetry, he is a Gandharva.

Pancajanya Krishna's conch shell.

Pandavas The sons of Pandu. They are Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

Pandu A son of Vyasa and one of the widows of Vichitravirya, he is the brother of Dhritarashtra and Vidura. He is ostensibly the father of the five Pandavas, although in reality they are the sons of various gods.

Paundra Bhima's conch shell.

Prahlada The king of the titans, who are not unlike the titans of Greek mythology.

Prajapati The creator. Means "lord of creatures." In later times, the name was also applied to Vishnu, Shiva, Time personified, the sun, fire, etc., as well as to lesser mythological figures.

Pritha Kunti.

Purujit The brother of Kuntibhoja. Fights on the side of the Pandavas.

Rama This name is shared by many figures in Hindu mythology. The most famous are Parashurama (Rama with the axe, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu), Ramachandra (the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, who killed the demon Ravana), and Balarama (the strong Rama, regarded as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu).

Rigveda The first Veda, consisting mostly of hymns in praise to the gods.

Rudra Shiva. Means “roarer, howler.” In the Vedas, he is the god of tempests and the father and ruler of the Rudras and Maruts. It became a name for Shiva in classical Hinduism.

Rudras Storm gods who are sometimes identified with, or distinguished from, the Maruts.

Sadhyas A class of celestial beings.

Sahadeva The youngest of the five Pandu princes. He is the son of Madri and the reputed son of Pandu, but really the son of the Ashvins. The twin brother of Nakula.

Samaveda The third Veda, consisting of hymns for chanting during rituals. Most of the verses are taken from the Rigveda.

Sanjaya A bard. He is the narrator of the Bhagavad Gita.

Sankhya In the Gita, it means theory. Also one of the six darshanas (perspectives), or schools of Indic philosophy.

Satyaki Yuyudhana.

Saubhadra Matronymic of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna by Subhadra.

Scorcher of Enemies A general epithet, used in the Gita for Arjuna and Dhritarashtra.

Shaibya The king of the Shibus.

Shankara Shiva. *See also* Vishnu.

Shikhandi A son of Drupada, he was born as a female, but was changed into a male by a Yaksha. In the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, he was instrumental in the killing of Bhishma, but afterwards was himself killed by Ashvatthaman.

Skanda Karttikeya, a god of war.

Slayer of Keshin Krishna.

Soma The intoxicating drink used in Vedic rituals. Also a name for the moon.

Somadatta A king.

Son of Dhritarashtra Duryodhana. In the plural, refers to the Kauravas.

Son of Kunti Arjuna.

Son of Pandu Epithet for any of the five sons of Pandu, but in the Gita, it refers to Arjuna. He is also called the ape-bannered son of Pandu.

Son of Pritha Arjuna in the Gita. In general, it is a patronymic for Yudhishthira, Bhima, and Arjuna.

Son of Vrishni Krishna, so called because he belonged to the Vrishni tribe (also known as the Yadavas).

Sughosha The conch shell of Nakula, one of the five Pandavas.

Supreme, the Brahman. Also referred to as the Supreme Reality.

Ucchaishravas Indra's horse. Produced by the churning of the Milk Ocean, and regarded as the archetype and king of horses.

Ushanas An ancient sage, in later times identified with Shukra, the teacher of the Asuras (demons).

Uttamaujas One of the warriors in the *Mahabharata*.

Varuna An Aditya. Varuna is one of the oldest of the Vedic gods. He is often regarded as the supreme deity, being styled "king of the gods" or "king of both gods and men" or "king of the universe."

Vasava Indra as chief of the Vasus.

Vasudeva Krishna.

Vasuki One of the three kings of the serpents. *See also* Ananta.

Vasus A particular class of gods whose chief was Indra, then later Agni and Vishnu.

Vayu The god of wind.

Vedanta One of the six darshanas (perspectives), or schools of Indic philosophy.

Vedas The collection of sacred hymns and ritual texts that are the earliest scriptures of Hinduism.

Vikarna A son of Dhritarashtra.

Vinata One of Kashyapa's wives, and the mother of Suparna, Aruna, and Garuda.

Virata An ancient king. The Pandavas, forced to conceal themselves during the thirteenth year of their exile, journeyed to his court and entered his service in various disguises.

Vishnu One of the principal deities of classical Hinduism, he is regarded as "the preserver." Along with Brahma "the creator" and Shiva "the destroyer", they constitute the trimurti, or triad. Although Vishnu comes second in the triad, he is identified with the supreme deity by his worshipers, and was later accorded the foremost place among the Adityas. He allows a portion of his essence to become incarnate on ten principal occasions in order to deliver the world from various great dangers.

Vishvedevas A class of gods. Means "the all-gods."

Vivasvat The sun. In epic poetry, regarded as the father of Manu Vaivasvata.

Vrishnis Krishna's tribe (also known as the Yadavas).

Vyasa A celebrated mythological sage and author. Often called Vedavyasa and regarded as the original compiler and arranger of the Vedas, he is also called Vadarayana, Badarayana, and Dvaipayana. When grown, he retired to the wilderness to lead the life of a hermit, but at his mother's request returned to become the husband of Vichitravirya's two childless widows, with whom he was the father of Dhritarashtra and Pandu. He was also the supposed compiler of the *Mahabharata* (yet also appears as a character within the epic), the *Puranas*, and other portions of Hindu sacred literature. But the name Vyasa, meaning "arranger, compiler," seems to have been given to any great editor or author.

Wolf Belly Bhima.

Yadava Krishna, so called because he belonged to the Yadava tribe (also known as the Vrishnis). Also simply a descendant of Yadu.

Yadu An ancient hero. Also the name of a country west of the Yamuna river.

Yakshas A class of supernatural beings, or spirits. Usually regarded as benevolent, but sometimes as malignant.

Yama The god of death.

Yoga In the Gita, most often means "mental discipline." Also one of the six darshanas (perspectives), or schools of Indic philosophy.

Yogi In the Gita, most often means "a master of mental discipline."

Yudhamanyu A warrior on the side of the Pandavas.

Yudhishtira The eldest of the five reputed sons of Pandu, but really the child of Kunti by the god Dharma, so he is often called Dharmaputra or Dharmaraja. He ultimately succeeded Pandu as king, first reigning over Indraprastha, and afterwards, when the Kuru princes were defeated, over Hastinapura.

Yuyudhana A son of Satyaka, he is a warrior who fights for the Pandavas.

Contributors

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