

# The Role of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata

Prof. K. S. NARAYANACHARYA



ACADEMY OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION





# **“THE ROLE OF SRI KRISHNA IN THE MAHABHARATHA”**

Five lectures by Prof. K. S. Narayanacharya  
delivered as :

**Gurudev Ranade Memorial Lectures  
for 1989-90**

*between 2nd June to 6th June 1990 (5 days)  
at the Gurudev Ranade Mandir  
Hindwadi, Belgaum.*

## **Topics of Lectures**

1. Sri Krishna as Statesman, Diplomat and Strategist,
2. Sri Krishna as Peace Maker,
3. Sri Krishna as Philosopher and Yogin,
4. Sri Krishna and the War,
5. Sri Krishna as Man and God.

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## The Author's Submission



Prof. K. S. Narayanacharya  
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I am happy indeed that these lectures on Sri Krishna, which I had the privilege of delivering as "Gurudev Ranade Memorial Lectures" for 1989-90, at the Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Belgaum, are being now published in the present book form.

I have never considered lecturing or book writing as mere pastime or a matter of dry academic life. To me they are ways of influencing society in the right way, in the hands of responsible men of learning. In the view of tradition we call this "Rishi Rina" - a duty we owe to the sages of the past, the duty of delivering their message to our contemporary men and women.

Society has never been perfect. But great men have never lost their lure to influence it towards, what looks like that impossible ideal. Sri Krishna, Bhagavan Veda Vyasa, Yudhishtira and other sages of the Mahabharata period were such lofty souls imbued with such mighty ideals. There have always been detractors like Jarasandha, Sisupala, Duryodhana, Karna, Shakuni and others to whom Dharma, Satya and other Cherished Values of our Indian Culture have been a matter of ridicule and scorn. We find them in our midst too! The war of Mahabharata is symbolically an unfinished one, with each one of us having sides to take, and with unmistakable stakes in terms of national and social welfare. I have never lost sight of this in all these five lectures. I shall be amply rewarded if the readers can see this contemporary relevance in the present book.



My deep sense of thanks are due to the office bearers of Sri Ranade Mandir Trust for having given me this opportunity to write out and deliver these lectures. I am deeply indebted to H. H. Sri Rangapriya Maha Desikar for his valuable Blessings, and to my esteemed senior friend and wellwisher Dr. N. S. Anantharangachariar Swamy for his splendid foreword. I am thankful to the Printers for having done their job so well in making this book, neat and attractive.

Dharwad 29-4-1992

**K. S. Narayanacharya**  
(Professor & Head. Dept. of English,  
Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad)

# BLESSINGS

*SRIMATHE RAMANUJAYA NAMAH  
SRI RANGA SADGURUVE NAMAH*

Dear Professor K. S. Narayanacharya,

Narayanasmaranas. Received your booklet " THE ROLE OF SRI KRISHNA" in the Mahabharata. I express my whole-hearted appreciation of this excellent gem in the garland of your literary master-pieces.

Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata has been viewed by some scholars as an Indian Machiavelli only. Some have tried to justify all his actions on the basis of the maxim "THE KING CAN DO NO WRONG." Some have followed the policy of "condemnation by faint praise" while depicting his role. All these opinions are results of either a shallow and narrow outlook or an outlook through coloured glasses.

But your lectures in this booklet have depicted Sri Krishna's true role in the great epic with the pen.of right reasoning dipped in sastriac knowledge. You excel in this book both as a literary critic and an advocate in defence of Dharma. Your arguments lead us to the right conclusion that Sri Krishna is Dharma Eternal and a bridge of that principle, "Krishnam Dharmam Sanatanam," "Dharmasya Setuh." In tune with the spirit of Veda Vyasa you have proclaimed in the end that Sri Krishna in his Mahabharata is not a man elevated to Divinity but Divinity Supreme descended to elevate man. I commend this book to all students of the Mahabharata and those who desire to make "reason and the will of God prevail."

May Lord Krishna raise His hand in benediction over your book.

With Narayana Smaranas.

**Astanga Yoga  
Vijnana Mandiram  
Bangalore 21-4-1992**

**Srirangasrih  
Rangapriya Yatih  
(Formerly Prof. H. S. Varada Desikacharya,  
Rtd. Head. Dept of Sanskrit  
National College, Bangalore)**



## PREFACE

I am glad to subscribe this brief preface to the scholarly treatise, 'The role of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata' by Prof. K. S. Narayanacharya. This volume contains the text of the five lectures delivered on the subject by the learned Professor at the Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Gurudev Ranade Mandir, Belgaum. It is very nice of the Academy to publish these lectures in a book form for the benefit of students and scholars interested in the subject and we must be highly grateful to the Academy for this.

Prof. Narayanacharya is one of the most eminent scholars of our country and needs no introduction. He is well known for his vast erudition and spiritual insight. He is a thinker in the real sense and many of his interpretations are most revealing. He is a prolific writer and a very popular exponent of our spiritual texts. It is indeed fortunate that he has chosen to write on our great epics and Vedic literature. Having a deep understanding of our spiritual and cultural traditions, he has set right many misinterpretations of our sacred texts. We can rely on him as an authentic and faithful interpreter of our great works.

The present volume contains five chapters representing five lectures given by the author. The author refers, in the very beginning, to the various viewpoints of different people about Sri Krishna, and points out rightly, that it is the human aspect of this incarnation that is highlighted in the Mahabharata, though He is undoubtedly revered as God. In the first lecture the role of Sri Krishna as statesman, diplomat and strategist is expounded with profuse references to the various situations in the Mahabharata. The second lecture is solely reserved for depicting Sri Krishna as a peace maker. The author traces the very many references in the Mahabharata, analyses them and makes an assessment on their merits, like a true investigator and comes to undeniable conclusions. The question - 'was Sri Krishna really sincere in his peace making efforts?' — is posed and answered. 'He wanted peace, but was prepared for war, in case those powers did not listen to his advice.' Krishna was a practical minded diplomat and subtleties of his diplomacy are traced according to the epic in a factual and interesting way. Sri Krishna's efforts were not to save Duryodhana, but the rest of the innocent world from the clutches of death. It was his duty

and great law of life to save all that can be saved. If he did not do it, even though he was capable of doing it, people later on would put the blame on him for not averting the war. The role of Krishna as a diplomat is thus thoroughly expounded.

Prof. Narayanacharya rises to heights when he delivers the third lecture on Sri Krishna as a philosopher and yogin. He rightly remarks here that great souls taught great wisdom but became martyrs because they lacked the practical wisdom to make their wisdom 'get on' in life. In this chapter the author has given an epitome of the essence of Gita. This is further supported by parallel teachings by Krishna under different circumstances in the Mahabharata. 'Krishna as a Yogin' is again a significant exposition marked by originality of thought and deep insight. The fourth lecture — 'Krishna's role in the war' is highly enlightening. The efficiencies and deficiencies of the important personalities like Bhishma, Drona, Karna and Ashwatthama are pointedly brought out and Krishna's role in their destruction is justly vindicated. The exposition of the author is sure to dispel the very many misconceptions and illusions about these great personalities. The author takes us to the very heart of the epic and reveals their true colours. The fifth and concluding lecture is on 'Sri Krishna as man and God.' Krishna is seen here as God. The concept of Avatara is explained in greater detail. The evidences in the epic declaring the truth of the incarnation of the Lord as Sri Krishna are gathered together. It is declared in the end that the primary purpose of the epic is to justify the greatness of Sri Krishna.

To write on the role of Sri Krishna is a mighty task and we may say that Prof. Narayanacharya has done it excellently. The activities and perfections of Sri Krishna are so many sided and very difficult to comprehend. Sri Krishna came on this earth at the junction of Dwaparayuga and Kaliyuga. The whole atmosphere was stormy, passionate and complex. Krishna was one typical perfect individual who devoted himself to the mending of the world. He was great in knowledge, great in refined emotion and great in action. He was indeed a maker of history.

Sri Krishna grew up in Nandagokula and in Vrindavana. His divine exploits, even during his childhood were inspiring ones and drew devotion towards him. His childish exploits and

'flirtations' with the Gopis have become celebrated themes of immortal poetry of great seers and mystics throughout the ages. After Sri Krishna came to Madhura, the area of his activity became widened. His mission now was to redeem the innocent people of his times from the intolerable burdens of militarism and abuse of power. The Kings of those days were mostly turbulent and despotic. Sri Krishna set out to demolish all that evil force for ushering in an age of benevolent rulership. He achieved this by his consummate statesmanship. Sri Krishna is most celebrated as the teacher of the highest truth. He has taught the most ancient and the most practical and real ethics and philosophy, for not only the enlightenment of Arjuna, but also for the enlightenment of hundreds of subsequent generations.

We must be thankful to Prof. Narayanacharya for this splendid exposition of the multifaceted personality of lord Sri Krishna. The learned professor is a master of many languages. His method of exposition is thorough and his style of writing is charming. The writings are packed with facts and are very well documented. A study of this work is richly rewarding. We expect many more works of this standard from the learned Professor.

I pray to the supreme Lord Sri Krishna to bless our Professor with good health, longevity of life and energy to serve Him more and more like this.

Bangalore  
16.4.1992

Dr. N. S. Anantharangachar  
Hon. Registrar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,  
Bangalore Kendra,  
& Formerly Deputy Director, Kannada  
Sanskriti Prasara Dept. Govt. of Karnataka,  
Bangalore



## PUBLISHER'S APPEAL

"The Mahabharat belongs to the world and not only to India. To the people of India, indeed, this epic has been an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength. Learnt at the knee with reverence and love, it has inspired great men to heroic deeds as well as enabled the humble to face their trials with fortitude and faith." (C. Rajagopalachari)

It is indisputable that the Mahabharata is the greatest book of Wisdom and one of the two magnificent epics of India. The other epic is Ramayana. To use the very words of Vyasa, the author of Mahabharata, it is a work of great merit, which contains the essence of Vedas, Vedangas, all the sciences, such as those of planet and stars, worldly sciences of logic, education, medicine, the description of nature, rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, the science of war and in short everything that is to be known is contained in this great work.

Professor K. S. Narayanacharya was entrusted with the task of delivering "Gurudev Ranade Memorial Lectures" for 1989-90 at the premises of the Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Belgaum. He wisely chose to lecture on "The Role of Sri Krishna In the Mahabharata," and accordingly delivered his lectures from 2nd June, 1990 to 6th June, 1990. The lectures he delivered are now being published in book form by this Academy. These lectures were marked with lucidity, simplicity and divinity. He dealt with several roles of Sri Krishna, including his role in the war during which Arjuna had lost his equipoise and discrimination. In a sullen mood, he had declined to fight against his own kith and kin for material gains. The ensuing discussion between Sri Krishna and Arjuna is the subject matter of the Bhagvat Geeta. It was during this discussion that Sri Krishna revealed to Arjuna his Divine Nature and compelled him to fight and win the war against the evil forces, with a view to bring back the rule of justice and Dharma.

In today's Bharata, we find various kinds of evils, such as, nepotism, corruption etc. playing havoc with the body politic. Hypocrisy and greed are the order of the day. People are suffering from hunger and thirst and pining to see Bharata restored to her pristine glory of "Suvarna-Bhoomi", and "Tapo-Bhoomi." Sri Krishna did not hesitate to destroy his own kith and



kin like Kamsa. We have now to invoke Sri Krishna to take birth again to root out the evil forces, which are bringing ruin to this sacred land of Bharata. It is of prime importance to note that he himself has promised to root out evil forces and protect the good and righteous.

On this day, the birthday of Sri Krishna, we place this book "Sri Krishna's Role in the Mahabharata" at his sacred feet and in the hands of "Janata Janardan." We hope the public will appreciate and find it instructive and interesting.

Krishna Astami  
21-8-1992

**N. S. Metrani,**  
Chairman,  
Academy of Comparative Philosophy  
and Religion, Belgaum

# **The Role of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharatha**

## **Preliminary :**

Many wise men have seen Sri Krishna of The Mahabharatha as God incarnate, come down on the earth to save the good and punish the evil souls, to uphold dharma and eliminate adharma, from the days of Bhagavan Veda Vyasa. Indeed Sri Krishna himself reveals this truth in the Bhagavad Gita,<sup>1</sup> and the devout and the pious have never doubted this to date, and have worshipped him, sought and received blessings from Him, and have offered themselves to him in total surrender, as per the last message of the Gita. (Ch. 18. Verse 65.)

Historians, however, do not agree with this, and dismiss all this as over-veneration of a bygone hero of the Mahabharatha days, promoting him from supermanhood to Godhead, gradually, over the last five thousand years or more. Generous historians would grudgingly grant that there might have been a man called Sri Krishna, from references in some upanishads<sup>2</sup> and allied literature, and if this is the one identical with the Sri Krishna of the Mahabharatha, myth has been mixed with reality in the Epic, to know whom accurately, we have to divest the Epic of its flight of literary imaginations, confabulations, exaggerations and arrive at the reality behind the grand halo, carefully. The ungenerous among historians would deny even this much possible reality of Sri Krishna as a personality and would require the usual proofs in terms of the traditional tools of historical verifications - like excavations of towns and cities associated with him etc.

There are those who would simply dismiss him as a deified cowherd boy, whose childish exploits have been much made of by those who are overfond of him, and therefore treat him as mere legendary hero.

To many others he is a mere symbol of Eternal Youth and Love, an embodiment of Aesthetic Perfection, sketched through human love in all its shapes and shades, and his historicity or otherwise does not detract them from this simple vision of that grand personality.

There is however another class of vulgar viewers to whom Sri Krishna is sheer humanity in all its depraved condition given to debauchery, erotic exploits, amorous sport etc. in his youth, and to schemy politics of betrayal, treachery, opportunism and deception in his later days. What if he talks of his religious ideals and grand Yogic perfections, in the Gita, which too, in all probability might not really have been his own teaching, but interpolated by someone else like Vyasa later on in the Epic?

Finally, there are also those who see in Sri Krishna nothing but a great yogin, whose message to us in the Gita is all that matters, and whatever else, associated with him, whether true or false, historically, has no effect of subtraction from this grand but simple sum up of all Vedic wisdom over the ages, as we see at the heart of the Epic.

Looking at the Epic itself and reading through its grand complex chapters, sometimes between the lines, there are those who see Sri Krishna as a Statesman par excellence, a perpetual strategist and diplomat, striving tirelessly to establish the Rule of the Right over that of Might; as one who tried to establish a right ethic for politics as well as social manners and customs, trying to uphold grand humanitarian ideals by embodying them in himself, as a great social reformer, as a mighty Peace-maker, as a friend of the poor and the needy, as a liberator of womenkind from their woes and from their oppressors and so forth.

Dismissing the question of the authenticity of the Epic, of its authorship viz. Vyasa, and the problem of interpolations as futile and inconsequential for our present purpose, as they can never be finally solved to everybody's total satisfaction, we shall confine ourselves, in these lectures, to one standard edition like the one published by the Gita Press, (Unless otherwise specified, as may be necessary, later on) and study some important aspects of Sri Krishna's personality as Bhagavan Vyasa and his other contemporaries saw him.

## **Sri Krishna as Statesman, Diplomat and Strategist**

In the main-narration of Bhagavan Vyasa and the Sub-narrations of Vaishampayana and Suta Pauranika of the story of Mahabharatha, though Sri Krishna has been undoubtedly venerated as God Incarnated and many of his exploits explained with supernatural colour, it is the human aspect of this avatar that is highlighted for the most part, i.e., wherever it does not involve the supernatural. Numerous are the instances of praise of Sri Krishna by Vyasa himself, Bhishma, Vidura and others, in terms of attributes that belong to the Supreme Brahman. There are of course detractors like Sishupala and Duryodhana who are opposed to this high veneration and identification of Sri Krishna with God. There are also the celestials like Narada, Indra and other gods, who are not historical figures by any stretch of imagination, and yet who participate in the story, giving it crucial turns, complicating the already complex story which has to be read mainly historically or with some sense of suggested symbolic truth, to make sense and be relevant to us. The story has obvious meanings on several planes - the spiritual, social, historical, literary and so on - with many of these shades commingling very often. It is the purpose of these lectures to isolate these shades of meaning, to whatever extent it may be possible, and gather maximum relevance for us from the great Epic, so that these aspects can be enjoyed one by one.

The most outstanding aspect of the complex personality of Sri Krishna in the Epic is that of an extraordinary statesman, diplomat and strategist, most far-sighted, and wedded to the ideal of establishing the Rule of the Right, mastering all the mighty machinations and manouvres of the wicked vested interests of evil and corruption, and by championing the cause of those who had the right to rule, along with all the potential qualities and characteristics that contributed to that rule of

benevolence. This is the continuous thread of the story that keeps the role of Sri Krishna absorbed and absorbing. Hence this aspect deserves to be dealt with substantially in detail, first.

Among the Seven major themes of the Mahabharatha as narrated by Vyasa, Sauti mentions this- “greatness of Vasudeva”<sup>3</sup>, (the others being, details of lives of the Kuru family, Gandhari's natural inclination towards Dharma, Vidura's wisdom and presence of mind, Kunti's power of endurance of suffering and her daring, the Pandavas' sense of Truth, and the wickedness of Kauravas). That greatness lay, among other things, in Sri Krishna's utter selflessness, in denying for himself any Emperorship which was so easily accessible to him, from which of course his mind was so totally detached as to be unbelievable; in his preference to make good Emperors than become one himself; in his masterly strategies to overthrow the mightiest among the ambitious of political power, in his extraordinary presence of mind, and balanced judgments of men and matters around him; in his great political wisdom and acumen; in his un-assuming nature of personality which could play any role, in the service of the good and the godly, including that of a servant, a messenger, a charioteer, and instructor, however mean that service may be considered by the vain-glorious and the arrogant princes of the day; in his being a friend, philosopher and guide of the oppressed, humiliated and the deceitfully vanquished - the Pandavas; in his unsurpassed ability for mediation, and tireless efforts to bring peace and avoid a fratricidal war and its terrible holocaust, (which, of course, came to nothing because of the power-brokers and decision - makers of the day,) and so forth. One may indeed say that this is the major among even these seven prime themes of the Epic.

Let us see some substantial instances and evidences for this thesis, somewhat chronologically.

## **2. Sri Krishna at Panchali's Wedding**

The first ever occurrence of Sri Krishna on the grand stage of the Mahabharatha drama is during the wedding scene of Panchali. From a microscopic analysis of the rich details of astronomical phenomena in the Epic, from the angles of both Indian and Western calendars, and methods of analysis, great scholars have arrived at the conclusion that at that time Sri

Krishna was about 20 years of age, the year being 3091 B.C.,<sup>4</sup> and the month being April. But had he met the Pandavas before ? we are not certain from the Epic itself. That he did know of them and their sufferings is evident from Srimad Bhagavatham, another work of Vyasa himself. From a careful scrutiny of this latter work we can infer that when Kamsa was killed and overthrown, Sri Krishna was just about 13 or 14 years young. And even at that young age (when his sportive exploits have endowed him with a superhuman ability as the Saviour of mankind) he sends a message with Akrura, the Chief minister of the ousted King Kamsa, to Dhritarashtra, in these words :-

“Hail to you, son of Vichitra Virya (Dhritarashtra), the fame earner of the Kurus. You are on the throne of Hastinavathi now, only because of the (untimely) demise of your brother, Pandu. If you rule by Right and please the people by straight and right character, and by displaying a sense of fairness and equality (among your sons and their cousins, the Pandavas) you will attain Heavenly good and fame here on the earth. If you behave otherwise, you will become the laughing stock of the world, and will sink into the darkness of Hell, (after death.) Therefore be equal minded to the Pandavas as well as to your sons, and behave accordingly. No one can anyhow live forever on this earth. Oh, King, one cannot keep eternal company with one's own body, let alone with wife or sons and so on. One comes alone into life, and disappears too alone; the good or evil deeds he does, he has to reap consequences of too, alone. The property earned by evil means will one day be taken away by foul means only by shortsighted men. It is like fish eating other fish in the name of relations . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

What a remarkable message ! And how firmly delivered ! Coming close after Kamsa's overthrow and his despatch to the other world, it has the added force of a personality as good in deeds as in words !! Sri Krishna has but to extend the field of his activities from Gokula and Brindavana to Hastinavati, to despatch more public enemies to that same other - worldly destination, and here is his first faint hint that he would not hesitate to do that, if his benign advice is not listened to by Dhritarashtra. There is also the clear vision of the political evil being rooted in Dhritarashtra more than in his son Duryodhana, and so the appropriateness of the choice of the recipient of

the message. The political message-indeed, warning, as we may call it - is also backed by the philosophical wisdom behind it, as is always characteristic of Sri Krishna, in the later Gita context. The quintessence of Gita is also here in a way, that life being transient, there is no use being attached to what one cannot take with oneself into the world beyond; and that one must do what is right without fear or favour to escape bondage. Such is the remarkable unity and majesty of Sri Krishna's personality and his message.

A second instance from Sri Bhagavatham reveals that although Sri Krishna knew what exactly transpired in the so called waxpalace-episode, yet he went to condole the deaths of Pandavas and Kunthi in the company of Bhishma, Vidura and others, as time was not yet propitious to reveal the truth.<sup>6</sup>

This means he kept sight on the track of the oppressed Pandavas carefully, that was characteristic of the shrewd politician that he was already becoming, at such young age.

Then we have the first reference in the Mahabharatha to Sri Krishna's identifying of the Pandavas at Panchali's Svayamvara from a distance, and his sharing of this secret information with Balarama and other Yadu chieftains.<sup>7</sup> Sri Krishna surveys the assembly of all the kings and princes assembled there, and an idea must have passed in his mind; which finds expression only during the arranged elopement of subhadra with Arjuna! There were young and old princes there, the handsome and the ugly, the famous and the notorious, the meek and the mighty, in an ill-assorted group, all vying with one another for the hand of Draupadi, in what might be described as a marriage for political convenience. Imagine Jarasandha, the aging, the mighty, invincible, ambition filled monarch of Magadha being there ! Shalya, the uncle of Pandavas, King of Madra was there too ! Shishupala the upcoming, loose-tongued, atheistic prince, was, of course, there. Duryodhana, Kama and their allies were there too. The marriage was a virtual gamble to choose the bridegroom, although the device involved was archery, and there was a chance that the best marksman alone would wed Draupadi. But there was no guarantee that that best marksman was also a handsome man or one of character and up to Draupadi's liking. It was not a marriage of Draupadi's liking at any cost,

and she had to put up with whatever unhappiness ensued, should there be any incompatibility between her and her spouse, chosen by such a strange method. She had no choice in it at all, and this was the most regrettable part of this gamble which was a favourite method of marriage in those days. Sri Krishna appears to be a hard critic of any such marriage where the bride's choice was null or belittled, as he tells Balarama later on<sup>8</sup> : the idea of 'selling' a girl in marriage (Kanya vikraya) would imply that the buyer was a mere customer and the seller was greedy of money; Swayamvara is undependable for its lottery; even the traditional 'giving away' of the bride (without obtaining her consent, as marriages were settled between parents only, in those days) had a docility about it, that it merely meant like the gifting away of a cow ! If a girl had no say in the marriage, and she did not like her partner chosen in any of these methods, she had a right to forsake even her parents and go with the man of her choice. That became the decided view of Sri Krishna as he justifies Subhardra's elopement with Arjuna later on. His own marriage with Rukmini was of a similar type. In none of his other marriages was there any trace of humiliation of the bride or her unwillingness or passive submission. So this view comes as a revolutionary one, looking to the customs, standards and practices of the day.

Why did Sri Krishna attend that Swayamvara, then? He had obviously no intention of participating in it; Draupadi was like his own sister, as he makes it clear several times, later on. Did he have a hand in the choice of the test that the marksman had to pass in winning the hand of Draupadi? We do not know. The device was obviously meant to filter the choice of the bridegroom, and pick out the best youth of the day. It was an intelligent test indeed - the matsya yantra. Sri Krishna must have come there personally to meet the Pandavas, and lend them his support in bringing them back to Hastinavathi. He must have guessed that Arjuna would not miss the occasion, and would come there in some disguise. For the marriage and the contest were widely publicised in advance, and Drupada's alliance was sought after by all ambitious and upcoming princes of the day. There was of course no disaster to happen, and Sri Krishna must have come there just to ensure that. Fortunately Draupadi rejected



Karna publicly, even before he lifted his bow, and the others, including Jarasandha, miserably failed even to lift up the bow or string it. That left the field entirely to Arjuna who was there in the disguise of a Brahmin, and so, fortunately all went well for Draupadi and the Pandavas. Sri Krishna was indeed happy and secretly followed the Pandavas, disguised as Brahmins, to their shelter at the Potter's house.

Sri Krishna offers salutations to Dharmaputra by touching his feet and announcing and introducing himself, in a formal way. Kunti greets Sri Krishna with joy. The five brothers are now face to face with Sri Krishna for the first time at least in the Epic. "How did you know us"? - enquires Dharmaraja. "Fire, though sought to be hidden, lets itself be known by others - obviously", replies Sri Krishna. "Who else could string that bow or shoot the target, other than Arjuna? By God's Grace you all escaped the fire trap at Varanavatha, and Duryodhana was deceived of his plot to burn you alive, fortunately." - he tells them.

Sri Krishna's blessing to Pandavas has this additional spiritual emphasis at the end, before he takes leave of them : "That which is hidden in your heart-caverns, take care of that, and you shall thrive well, like fresh-kindled fires. Let none know your true selves in your present disguises; Farewell to you; we shall return to our camp."<sup>9</sup>

This message gives a valuable clue to Sri Krishna's style and direction of political diplomacy : he liked the Pandavas, not for mere blood relationship, but for their steadfastness in Truth and their love of the Righteous. The refrain in the Mahabharatha that Sri Krishna is on the side of the Right, and success is where there is Right is amply justified in these instances. (Yatho Dharmastato Krishnah, Yatho Krishnastato Jayah.) He says later on in the Gita that the purpose of his Avatar is to re-establish and uphold Dharma - the law of the Right and Truth - whenever there is a dimness of its lustre and evil props up its head in history. Vyasa Venerates Sri Krishna as Dharma incarnated in numerous instances in the Epic. Otherwise where was the need for him to follow the track of the Pandavas in all their distresses, sometimes unknown even to them (as in the present case) and vindicate their cause, unasked for ! This is strange to politics by any standards, whether now or then ! Great statesmen have often staked their lives to do the Right and

Just in the cause of humanity. But few have succeeded in overthrowing all the collective plots of evil forces, and come out in flying colours out of such dangers to their own life or that of their otherwise helpless dependents. That is the greatness of Sri Krishna - to have worked for Dharma, and made that Dharma, strong and self-efficacious and saved humanity. The reversal of historical trends in the direction of the Right is a Superhuman task, and all the Avatars are such instances. This reversal happens not by direct personal action or interference here, as in others, but through the instrumentality of political manoeuvres. We can see more instances of the like, hereafter.

### 3. The Cultivating of Arjuna

Sri Krishna, according to internal, astronomical evidences of the Mahabharatha, was born on 27th Friday, in the month of July, 3112 B.C. at 11.40 P.M. Arjuna was 46 days older than him.<sup>10</sup> The episode that we now mention, that of Arjuna's marrying Subhadra (Sri Krishna's sister) after 'abducting' her with the full knowledge, instigation and blessing of Sri Krishna, took place in April 3084 B. C., when both Sri Krishna and Arjuna were between 27-28-years of age.

Arjuna has already wed draupadi and Sri Krishna has made the fabulous presents in jewels, silks, woolen rugs, beds, chariots, studded jewels, vessels, numerous male and female servants, handsome, healthy and obedient and well dressed. Not to speak of elephants, horses and countless wealth in gold and precious gems. <sup>11</sup>

By a strange ordaining, Draupadi was to be the common wife of all the five pandavas. Though polyandry was a rare type of marriage even in those days, there were precedents for it as Dharmaraja relates.<sup>12</sup> But polygamy was a common practice, more so among the princely order, for obvious political advantages. Every new wife for a prince, brought so much political force behind her, with unquestioned loyalty. Draupadi had by her marriage elevated the Pandavas into a major political force that the Kauravas now could not discount or ignore. But that was not enough by itself to install them on the throne of the Kurus. Sri Krishna must have been anxious to throw the lot of the Yadavas with that of the Pandavas, and the chance came up in a strange way.

The five brothers had mutually agreed that Draupadi should live in turn with each of them for a year, and the other four should not see her in the company of that fifth, under any circumstances. That was a vow of great consequence, in so far as it contributed to the unity among the brothers and mutual trust and respect.

An exceptional situation arose once. It happened this way: Arjuna had to undertake a pilgrimage to undergo expiation for the sin of having seen Dharmaputra and Draupadi Together, thus breaking the vow, while trying to pick up his weapons for retrieving the lost cows of a Brahmin. Whether it was a thinly disguised pilgrimage, being really a plan to survey the country politically, for seeking new alignments political and marital, and arranged as such, one cannot say. We cannot answer why Arjuna had placed his weapons in Dharmaraja's bedroom! If that was not his actual bedroom but a mere general weaponstore of all the five brothers we cannot explain why Dharmaputra was making love to Draupadi there on that occasion !! He was not given to making love in all sorts of places. There is room to infer or argue that this was a mere plan to send Arjuna for sometime under the pretext of a pilgrimage but actually seeking more alignments. If so whose plan was it, and whether Sri Krishna had a hand in it, cannot be conclusively proved from the Epic. But what is certain is that he visits Manipuri, the land of Nagas; weds Ulupi and gets a son by her, by name Iravant and gets the political and military support of all the Naga population there. Similarly he visits another north-eastern province, weds Chitrangada, and he gets Babruvahana as a son and is politically backed by all that race in the name of this marriage. It is at Prabhasa he meets Sri Krishna, and visits Dwaraka, weds Subhadra and gets the backing of the Yadavas too ! Arjuna was exceptionally self-controlled, and can by no stretch of imagination be described to be given to loose morals. His description as 'Guda Kesha' stands for this firmness of moral character, symbolically. Ulupi and Chitrangada fall in love with him, and their marriages are at their instances only; so also subhadra's marriage is at Sri Krishna's instance only, though there was love at first sight in all these instances. But one does not go on a pilgrimage and have a spree of marriages in this way. This is more than normal, though, of course, he visits also actually a number of pilgrim centres all over the country.

What are we to make out of this part of the Epic ? At least in the episode of Subhadra, we have a clue. Arjuna cultivates the deep friendship of Sri Krishna, under the latter's initiative. Indeed the friendship is so deep that they share entertainments together and are but one in two bodies as it were. Arjuna becomes the darling of all the clans of Yadavas in a short while, and earns their admiration and confidence. Then comes that famous festival at the hillock Raivataka. Having observed that Subhadra and Arjuna had already exchanged love - glances, Sri Krishna offers to negotiate the marriage himself, to Arjuna. Where is the urgency, and why should this marriage be hastened or even precipitated ? one may ask. Sri Bhagavatam, in a parallel description, adds that otherwise there was an insistent proposal backed by Balabhadra that Subhadra was to be offered to Duryodhana, strengthening thereby the alliances between the Kurus and Yadavas. <sup>13</sup> Though this was a rumour, there was every probability about it. Sri Krishna was anxious to avert this unmitigated political disaster, bound as he was to the Polity of Dharma. It was deep foresight on his part, and shrewdness that not merely averted that mishap, but turned it to the advantage of the Pandavas. Sri Bhagavatham adds that Vasudeva and Devaki fully shared Sri Krishna's vision, confidence and opinion on this matter and concurred about - Subhadra's running away with Arjuna. <sup>14</sup>

Balabhadra never thought or acted independently ! Where he unusually ventured an opinion, or meant to take a step of action, he was always subject to correction or rectification by Sri Krishna, and he accepted clarifications and pacifications almost with the facile mind of a child, and Sri Krishna was, as usual, sure of assuaging the unenlightedly hurt feelings of his elder brother. He argues that Arjuna has actually honoured the Yadus, far from denigrating them by this alliance. For Arjuna neither considers the Yadus as greedy of bride-fee, (Kanya shulka) nor is the choice of Svayamvarah beyond his reach ! Is he not handsome? Which girl does not love Arjuna ? He is not at all afraid of combating with the other suiters, if it came to that. This type of (Rakshasa) marriage does full justice to all, as it establishes Arjuna as a warrior par excellence, as it frees the Yadus from the evil practice of selling the bride and endows the marriage act with a glory that cannot be found in an otherwise docile handing over of the girl

to the bridegroom, etc. Fighting him now under the illusion of retrieving the 'lost' honour, would be a sure way of bringing dishonour and disaster on themselves !

What a masterly strategy and how deft its handling ! The wrath of Balarama and the fury of the Yadava chieftains might have had a different result, but for Sri Krishna's clever and timely intervention. After all he had anticipated it, and had plans for its dissipation, as he was the master-mind behind this plot.

It is Sri Krishna's motivation behind all this that deserves our especial attention here. And we cannot explain or understand it except in terms of a grand and mighty rule of the Right that he was planning with Yudhisthira as a monarch, and each of these little but sure steps of Sri Krishna was in that definite direction only. The Dharma - Samsthapaka (Establisher of Dharma) was first trying to strengthen that Dharma to make it stand on its own feet, by no miracles, but by normal commonsense methods that a statesman of foresight would inevitably resort to. That is the beauty of the human side of Sri Krishna's personality.

#### 4. Friend of the Pandavas.

Arjuna returns to his brothers after twelve years of all this unusual pilgrimage of love and politics ! Subhadra had yet to face Draupadi's wrath and rivalry ! It was the righteous wrath of a dutiful wife that wanted to possess all her husband's unshared comprehensive love for herself. Pacification was not easy. Sri Krishna must have thought of a plan and told his sister. That plan actually worked and yielded dividends in unexpected proportions. It was that Subhadra had to disguise as a cowherdess, and surrender herself at the feet of Draupadi as her humble servant and let the story out; and that Sri Krishna would follow her, along with Balarama and other Yadava chiefs to offer rich and fabulous presents that were due to the newlywed couple. Sri Krishna actually stayed at Indraprastha for a very long period, supervising in a covert manner the happy wedded life of Subhadra and Arjuna, and strengthening his divine and supremely unselfish love of the Pandavas, to infuse greater self-confidence in them, as the lawful would-be-rulers of the nation.

When Subhadra gave birth to Abhimanyu, the Divine Poet Bhagavan Veda Vyasa adds a very touching human note that

strikes the most enjoyable aesthetic chords of our heart-instruments : it is that the young baby, his nephew, was so exceedingly dear to Sri Krishna, that all the baby's daily care and attention was his own for a long time to come. However low and mean those duties might be in the others' eyes, Sri Krishna never felt them so, was never repelled by them, or never got tired or bored. <sup>15</sup> That was the depth of that love of this rare maternal uncle who did not receive anything approximating to it from his own uncle !! It was all hatred in his own case that he had to receive ! Having known from first-hand experience what an uncle was not to be, but was, perhaps, he wanted to let know the world what an uncle could be, and was to be, and never was not to be, in deed and words. A heart that never tasted the honey or nectar of an uncle's love was thus to be a super-abundant source of that very love in his own nephew's case. It was this divine love that enabled Abhimanyu take after his uncle Sri Krishna, in handsomeness, heroism, daring, and even physical features, as Arjuna could notice day by day. <sup>16</sup>

We have another instance of this overflowing love of Sri Krishna for the Pandavas, in the Khandava - burning episode which was a prelude to the later Rajasuya, and the full glory of the five Brothers.

Arjuna offers as sacrifice the uninhabitable Khandava forest to Agni, the God of Fire, and gets divine weapons, a unique chariot, and an unmatched bow and many boons in return for protecting Agni finish that forest unhindered from the interference of Indra and his rain - clouds. This, Arjuna was able to achieve, with Sri Krishna as companion and witness.

In that self same forest was hiding Maya the demon architect, who was also about to be reduced to ashes, along with all else that was burning. Agni would not let him escape. Maya seeks refuge under Arjuna, and under Sri Krishna's direction, Arjuna grants him asylum and free escape. Arjuna does not think of how to convert this into his own political advantage, when Maya repeatedly offers to render whatever service he was capable of, as a token of gratitude. Arjuna says at first that it is enough if Maya bears affection for him, but when Maya insists on being useful to Arjuna in some tangible manner, Arjuna leaves the matter to the consideration of Sri Krishna and says that if Krishna is pleased, he is also pleased.

It is now Sri Krishna's turn to do another boundless good to the Pandavas and so he desires a magnificent mansion to be built with all the wonders of the world accommodated in it, such as to be beyond imitation, and combining in it designs and devices, architecturally celestial, terrestrial and Asuric or Titanic. So does this wonderful Assembly Hall (Sabha) come up in a plot of ten thousand square feet, in a short time of 14 months so as to be useful in all the six seasons of the year. This was a thoughtful gift of Sri Krishna to the Pandavas made through the hands of Maya, which they might have lost, had Arjuna insisted on accepting nothing from Maya !

This mystery Hall of Assembly was later on to be the envy of the Kauravas, and the scene of Duryodhana's self-sought insult, and the seed of his unbearable hatred for the Five Brothers that grew into the Mighty Mahabharatha War, later on, in which all the enemies of the Pandavas were killed and destroyed, to pave the way of the Rule of the Right once for all.

## **5. The Counsel of Rajasuya.**

It was Narada's suggestion to Yudhisthira that he should perform the Rajasuya to become 'Samrat' or the Supreme Emperor of the then known entire world. There is an elaborate chapter <sup>17</sup> in this context about the duties of an ideal emperor and his various policies, political, social, educational, financial, commercial and so forth.

Yudhisthira invites Sri Krishna from Dwaraka for urgent consultation in this regard. The implications of Rajasuya politically and financially, and the practical hurdles Yudhisthira has to overcome, how they can be overcome etc. are analysed by Sri Krishna and impressed on Yudhisthira, in a masterly manner, showing the mature wisdom and practical thinking of Sri Krishna. It is worth explaining in some detail here. <sup>18</sup>

Sri Krishna recalls first that the true Kshatriya race was extirpated by Parashu Rama, and what is left over is either a mediocre motley race or a cross-breed of mixed castes. Even of these, only about one hundred and one are extant at the time. But most of these rulers languish in the jails of Jarasandha, awaiting the date of their execution, like sacrificial animals to Rudra, whom he wants to propitiate in the ambition of becoming the Supreme Monarch of the World. There is thus

none who can cross swords with this Jarasandha of Magadha, or cross his ambitious purpose. On the contrary there are many who toe his path, in the hope of attaining secured chieftainships under his tutelage. Sishupala is one such upcoming arrogant political chieftain. There are others like Danthavakra, Hamsa, Dimbhaka, Karabha, the Greek Prince (Yavana) who commands Mura and Naraka; there is also Bhagadatta, and Paundraka the fool who thinks that he is God incarnate, with his assuming the Godly insignia like the Divine Discus and Conch; the forces of Surasenas, Bhadrakaras, Shalvas, and others are formidable to overcome. There are the Panchalas (who are already befriended and subdued by betrothal through Draupadi); and yet the Matsyas are there in the south. True, Kamsa has already been uprooted, and his wives, the daughters of Jarasandha, widowed, thus depressing the might of the latter by however small a degree. But a straight fight with him prolonged over even three hundred years is not likely to bring him down on his feet. Even Sri Krishna has personal experience of his might. Had not the Yadavas migrated to Dwaraka from Mathura, under his perpetual fear, and the memory of some seventeen attacks and being beseiged ! Jarasandha has supernatural blessings and powers, and he is the main hurdle before Dharmaraja, on the way to Rajasuya. Dharmaputra is no doubt, endowed with all ideal qualities that would make a Samrat or monarch. But what about Duryodhana, his cousin, who has Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Asvathama, Kripa and other mighty warriors on his pay rolls? would he easily agree to Yadhishthira's emperorship? He is not to be underestimated in his power of nuisance, if not of immediate evil. There is still Sisupala, the cunning, loyal to Jarasandha, a pure opportunist. The frustrated Rukmi, Sri Krishna's own brother-in-law, and the uncultured but self-trained Ekalavya, the Vanavasi ruler, are also to be reckoned with in the final count. Sakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana is notorious for his crookedness, and one must beware of his endless cunning plots and must count on him as a major power to overcome, if not militarily, at least politically and tactically. But in any case Jarasandha is the first problem to attend to; and there are ways of overthrowing him, and hence no need for panic.

Such is the down-to-earth approach of Sri Krishna, in which there is neither an underestimate nor overestimate of the



opponents to be overcome for the successful performance of the Rajasuya. This survey would show that Sri Krishna practically knew every ruler of every part of the India and the outside world of those days, and had kept an observant eye on their movements, their alliances, alignments, their political thinking, their mentors, their supporters, their strength and weaknesses and so on. There was indeed nothing that was not known to him.

Sri Krishna, in his childhood, boyhood and youth had personally vanquished and killed many of the followers of Kamasa, and Kamsa himself. But that was not enough. He had to groom up a small team of level headed princes who would heed his advice, follow his suggestions, subscribe to the ideal of the Rule of the Right, and never swerve from Dharma, towards the greater goal of establishing the Empire of Dharma - Dharma Samrajya. He had discovered the Pandavas as possessing all the potentials to constitute this small team of his workmen. But the immediate job was to strengthen them in every way possible and train them in diplomacy and tactics. They required no further training in the science of Warfare. For, they were the best soldiers in the world, next only to Sri Krishna himself. But they had to acquire steadfast friends and allies, and muster huge armies. Panchali's wedding had thrown the lot of the Panchalas with that of the Pandavas; well, and good. But that was not enough. Even the Yadava alliance was not much. The Rajasuya, and its auxiliary conquering of the Directions (Digvijaya) could either subdue the enemies of Dharma, or befriend them (albeit temporarily) and bring them under the umbrella of Yudhisthra, and this would be a decisive moment of polarisation of the heterogeneous forces scattered all over the land. Even so, Jarasandha was not to be expected to yield to Yudhisthira's forces in a straight fight; nor was he likely to become a friend on simple terms. If only he could be eliminated from the political scene, many under him or in his prisons would easily follow Yudhisthira; that would also be a warning to those others sitting on the fence, by serving the first shot in the air. It would also minimise unnecessary bloodshed. Those minor rulers with misguided loyalties, out of fear or weakness would not be a problem, once Jarasandha was eliminated.

Thus the priorities were fixed and Sri Krishna's political vision was vindicated by the events to come.

## 6. Sri Krishna's Strategem to overthrow Jarasandha.

Jarasanda's circumstance of birth had already become legendary. He was born with the two vertical halves of his body, delivered by two mothers, (his father's queens) and mistakenly thrown away outside the palace, being taken for lifeless. A demoness joined them at dead of night, out of curiosity, being struck by the symmetrical beauties of the thrown halves. This hero is said to have come to sudden life at that moment. His life-giver was thus that Demoness - Jara. Hence his name. Whatever the symbolic meaning of this episode may be, it certainly is a hair-raiser, and points to something abnormal or supernatural about his very birth. He had worshipped Shiva and had had his vision too. He had a host of mighty and obedient followers and nourished the dream of becoming the crowned monarch of the whole world. He was pious and generous within a ritualistically narrow range. He respected and honoured Brahmins; he gave away unto the learned Brahmins in the Vedas the gifts they desired, and never said 'no' to any of them, any time, after midnight! That was the strange hour of his charity !! This was a fame-earning trick, perhaps; or a way of pleasing the easily appeasable Brahmins, thereby reserving all his wrath and rivalry for other competing rulers ambitious of becoming emperors. He had imprisoned in his jails some vast numbers of royally crowned princes, to be executed and offered as human sacrifices to his chosen deity, at a propitious moment, for obtaining more supernatural powers. His religious sense, charity, generosity and other virtues never got extended to these unfortunate souls. His Dharma was thus a mere medium of exchange for super human powers from the gods, and was absolutely commercial in motive and nature, so elaborately condemned by Sri Krishna himself in the Gita, later on, as *Rajasas*. Helpless and impoverished Brahmins could be fooled by this religiosity in a way as they were at the receiving end; but how could God be fooled? or His Incarnation on the earth?

Jarasandha had chosen a strategic township on five hilltops for his Capital. It was literally justified in being described as *Girivraja*. Inaccessible to his enemies and hidden on hillocks, it was guarded by three automatically warning Drums, made out of the skin of a (flesh-eating) Carnivorous Bull, which had been killed by the father of Jarasandha.

Sri Krishna sets out on a journey to this mysterious place, along with Bhima and Arjuna, after assuring full safety for these brothers to the somewhat untrusting Yudhisthira. The three took no weapons with them, no armies, or no bodyguards even! What was Sri Krishna's plan ?

Sri Krishna never believed in unnecessary bloodshed in politics. Like an expert surgeon who would treat the diseased part of the body only and cut out the cancerous or defunct limb for the better health of the rest of the body organism, he would apply his political cure only to the overgrowths and outgrowths of the then body-politic of the country. One can see this everywhere in Sri Krishna's life, starting with the disposal of Kamasa. The rest of Mathura was never touched or troubled, the people never scared or plunged in civil war. In fact most people neither knew the problem nor the solution when it came. They had only been silent sufferers earlier, and became only mute beneficiaries. It is only the wise and the deeply pious who knew the agonies of Devaki and Vasudeva, or of Ugrasena and other large numbers of meek sufferers, languishing in his prisons. It is only Kamsa's style and aim of political functioning that he objected to and ended, as it could not be mended. That was Sri Krishna's logic in Jarasandha's case too ! He was beyond mending, as he could be neither intimidated nor converted into doing the right. Politics is mostly a strange field of activity, which does not permit forgiving the unforgiveable. Sri Krishna was neither a rival for power in respect of Jarasandha nor was he a personal beneficiary by his death. The decision that Jarasandha must be eliminated was taken purely in public interest and the larger interest of the establishment of a welfare state as it was then understood, and both Brihaspati and Shukra permitted this in their codes. (We have seen this policy negatively vindicated in our own days, in the failure of the Gandhian ethic that whole societies or communities can be, and actually must be, converted to doing and thinking the Right by Non violence only.) Sri Krishna did not wait to risk doing 'Himalayan' 'Blunders' or leave behind him insoluble problems as perpetual legacies. Thus Sri Krishna's decision has an unquestionable wisdom and sagacity about it.

Then comes the question of the fairness or otherwise of the method employed. Those who question Sri Krishna's method of elimination of these public enemies have a serious consideration to make. Sri Krishna believed that with respect

to unfaithful politicians, he had a right to convert their very virtues into their disadvantages, and make political capital out of them for the other oppressed party whose cause he was espousing. Lawbreakers have no right to insist on those very laws being followed by their adversaries ! This is sheer perversion and politically disastrous. Jarasandha's very vows of charity and generosity to Brahmins were exploited ; Bhima, Arjuna and Sri Krishna being disguised as Brahmins, receive his hospitality orally, and reserve to be treated to it at midnight; but the strange "alms" asked for, turns out to be not food or victuals, but of straight combat. Jarasandha is trapped and is made to commit himself to it. But the choice of Bhima for his opponent combatant is his own- and he has none to blame, other than himself - and he kept his word. When the uneven combat stretched for thirteen days with no signs of yielding any result, Sri Krishna suggests obliquely that only the tearing away of Jarasandha's body vertically and throwing away the pieces assymmetrically would deprive him of life. He does this by a sign, not orally. He had thought that Bhima knew the secret of this strength or weakness of this legendary giant, having heard all about him earlier; but as Bhima had obviously forgotten it in the hour of his need, Sri Krishna merely reminded him, never actually interfering in the combat. Even so, there are still many who would blame Sri Krishna of adopting unfair means in this and many other later instances. How could a Dharma-establisher adopt such 'adharmic' methods, even to achieve Dharmic ends finally ? - they ask.

We have already answered this in a way so far by the detailed analysis of Sri Krishna's style of strategies. To be more precise, we can add these :

(i) The days of Brihaspati's code that a good end had to be achieved by an equally good means were already over by the time of the Mahabharatha heroes. It was thrown into oblivion as impracticable and useless and two of its greatest exemplars, Bhishma and Vidura had already become laughing stocks of the day. The mad upsurge of selfish politics all around had caused an enormous confusion and stampede and there was no uniform guide or code, politically in terms of morals, that mutual adversaries could follow. What might dictated and indicated came to be accepted in a docile way by the lesser men and mediores.

(ii) We are talking of the days when the Great Age of Retardation (Kaliyuga) was rubbing on the wrong side, the shoulders of Dwapara. The exemplars of the virtues or vices of this age were people like Kamsa, Jarasandha, Duryodhana and their followers.

(iii) The 'Dharma' they had followed, like being good and generous to Brahmins, like performing the Vedic-prescribed Yagas and Yajnyas on a large scale, was only to hood-wink the orthodox believers and silence them from criticising their otherwise wrongdoings, wrong and anti-human ambitions, and actual inhuman plots to achieve quick success by short cuts to reach their political ambitions.

(iv) The larger duty of the Dharma-Establisher was first to redefine that Dharma so lost in following rituals, and appeasing the gullible, and show the grand aim of life as the achievement of perfection for oneself and others through dedicated work, self-knowledge, love of the Divine and self-surrender to God, which Sri Krishna superbly does in the Gita later on. But he never fails to scatter hints about this grand teaching, whenever there is an occasion he can use for it.

(v) The next duty of the Dharma-Establisher was to expose these false, self-proclaimed 'Dharmika's, and trick them into pitfalls by their own standards, by their own methods, by their own deeds and words, remorselessly. If someone wants to kill you by offering you a poisoned cup of milk, under the etiquette of treating you to a drink, as normal courtesy, how is it wrong to offer it back to him and make him drink it himself, by the same etiquette, when you are not supposed to know, but actually know, its poison-content? Sri Krishna did no more than this! It was Shukra Niti that he followed in all this, as the next best for Brihaspati Niti, whose days were over. The really undesirable alternative would have been a free for - all type of politics, by which any one could resort to any method for any end, good or bad notwithstanding, resulting in large scale suffering to vast masses, needless bloodshed, and no guarantee of any definite good emerging out of all this deluge or chaos.

(vi) Once it was decided that Jarasandha must be

eliminated, other matters were less important for Sri Krishna. After all even the elimination of adharma is a type of dharma too ! It may not be conventionally accepted so in an age of transient codes of political or social conduct. Mere conventions do not make dharma or adharma, when the very ground of their operation is changed radically. In the context of changed circumstances the Dharma-establisher had to ensure first that the necessary ground for the true operation of Dharma was first created. It is like digging downwards into the earth to lay foundations for a building that can only be built upwards. It is only the vulgar fools that do not see digging also as auxiliary for building. After all Sri Krishna simply turned Jarasandha's own table on him! He did not invent a crooked method from outside.

(vii) Those that criticise Sri Krishna here, must first examine Jarasandha's larger political ambitions, his imprisoning of scores of crowned princes, his idea of Human - Sacrifice, his notion of God and worship etc. Not to do this would amount to exonerating him and laying all the guilt at Sri Krishna's doors. Those that condone evil on the one hand have no right to talk of it on the other hand, elsewhere, and can never be trusted as good arbiters in the conflict of Evil with Good. The same applies to the other strategems followed by Sri Krishna while eliminating Duryodhana and his mighty followers.

## Chapter 1

१. परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृतां ।  
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥ (गीता ४-८)
२. a) तद्धैतत् घोर आंगिरसः देवकीपुत्राय उक्त्वा उवाच ॥ घांदोग्य  
(३-१७-६)  
b) ब्रह्मण्यो देवकीपुत्रो ब्रह्मण्यो मधुसूधनो ... ॥ (अथर्व नारायण)
३. वासुदेवस्य माहात्म्यं the others being :-  
a) विस्तरं कुरूवंशस्य,  
b) गान्धार्या धर्मशीलतां,  
c) क्षतुः प्रज्ञां,  
d) धृतिं कुन्त्याः,  
e) पाण्डवानां च सत्यतां,  
f) दुर्वृत्तं धार्तराष्ट्रानां... सम्यक् द्वैपायनोऽब्रवीत्  
(Adi Parvan, 1-99, 100)
4. The Date of the Mahabharatha War and The Kali Yugadi, (1969) By Prof. K Srinivasa Raghavan. (Pub. N Subba Narayana, 119, Big Street, Triplicane, Madras 600,005) p.31
५. भो भो वैचित्रयवीर्यं त्वं कुरूणां कीर्तिवर्धन ।  
भ्रातर्युपरते पाण्डावधुनासनमास्थितः ॥  
वर्तमानः समः स्वेषु श्रेयः कीर्तिमवाप्स्यसि ॥  
अन्यथा त्वाचरँलोके गर्हितो यास्यसे तमः ।  
तस्मात् समत्वे वर्तस्व पाण्डवेष्व्वात्मजेषु च ॥  
नेह चात्यन्तसंवासः कर्हिचित् केनचित् सह ।  
राजन् ! स्वेनापि देहेन किमु जायात्मजादिभिः ॥  
एकः प्रसूयते जन्तुः एक एव विलीयते ।  
एकोऽनुभुङ्केत् सुकृत एक एव च दुष्कृतम् ॥  
अधर्मोपचितं वित्तं हरन्त्यन्येऽल्पमेधसः ।  
संभोजनीयापदेशैः जलानीव जलौकसः ॥  
(Sri Bhagavatham X-49-17 to 22)

६. विज्ञातार्थोऽपि गोविन्दः दध्नानाकर्ण्य पाण्डवान् ।  
कुन्ती च कुल्यकरणे सह रामो ययौ कुरून् ॥  
भीष्मं च विदुरं चैव गान्धारीं द्रोणमेव च ॥ (Ibid X-57-1)
७. Mh Bharatha, Adi, 186-8,9.1 and 188-20 to 24
८. Mh. Bharatha, Adi, 220-3,4,5
९. भद्रं वोऽस्तु निहितं यद्गुहायां  
विवर्धध्वं ज्वलन इवैघमानाः ।  
मा वो विदुः पार्थिवाः केचिदेव  
यास्यावहे शिविरायैव तावत् ॥ (Adi, 190-25)
१०. The Date of the Mahabharatha War etc.
११. Adi, 198-13to19 verses
१२. Ibid, 195-14,15
१३. दुर्योधनाय रामस्तां दास्यतीति न चापरे । (१०-८६-३)
१४. (अर्जुनः) जहारानुमतः पित्रोः कृष्णस्य च महारथः (१०-८६-९)
१५. दयितो वासुदेवस्य बाल्यात् प्रभृति चाभवत् ।  
जन्मप्रभृति कृष्णश्च चक्रे तस्य क्रियाः शुभाः ॥ (Adi २२०-७०)
१६. कृष्णस्य सदृशं शौर्ये वीर्ये रूपे तथाऽऽकृतौ ।  
ददर्श पुत्रं बीभत्सुः मघवानिव तं तथा ॥
१७. Sabha - 5
१८. Ibidi - 14.



### Sri Krishna as Peace-maker

The justness of the strategems used by Sri Krishna cannot be established without detailed analysis of the characters of Duryodhana, Bhishma, Karna, Drona, Saindhava, Bhurisravas, and others and assessing their loyalties for or against Dharma, in the final analysis. More of this we shall reserve for a later occasion. But meanwhile an urgent aspect of Sri Krishna's role in conducting the Kaurava-Pandava affairs commands our immediate attention.

Meanwhile let us remember the situation accruing till the moment of his mediation or embassy to the Royal Court of Dhritarashtra : (a) After Yudhishtira had got Jarasandha cleared out of his way, under Sri Krishna's instructions, he sends his brothers in all the four directions and the whole world is conquered formally, with the princes everywhere agreeing to recognise Yudhishtira as their sovereign and willing to be directed by him, and work under him for the establishment of Dharma. That was the significance of the Vedic Rajasuya Yaga, ritualistically as well as politically. The Sovereign so crowned by Sri Krishna himself, honoured him as the best, deserving worship in the august assembly of the world's greatest princes, warriors, sages, saints, and wise men.

b) This roused up the pent up jealousies and suppressed hatred of Sri Krishna on the part of Sishupala, who had lost his mentor in Jarasandha and friends in Kamsa, and others. His unprintable abuses poured on Sri Krishna, unbridled by the surprised assembly, cost him his head, which rolled down then and there, at the hand of Sri Krishna. Thus one more potential enemy of Dharma was identified and eliminated, making Yudhishtira's rule more safe and smooth.

c) The glory of the crowning ceremony which fanned the envy of the ever-envious Duryodhana, prompted him to lay a new plot to rob Yudhishtira of all this hard earned glory by a deceitful method, details of which were worked out by his cunning

uncle Shakuni. Handy came the Vedic injunction that a Rajasuya performer was also to play a nominal ritualistic dice. Although the original purpose was to vanquish any more possible, potential opponents of Dharma of which the new sovereign was a symbol and protector, it turned out to be a travesty of that divine injunction here, as it was not the Emperor who invited such hidden opponents, but the opponents themselves openly inviting the Emperor for a 'friendly' dice, thereby silencing the Emperor and the public about the true intentions that so prompted them, and by snubbing those who could read between the lines and see through the evil intentions.

d) The new sovereign who had consulted Sri Krishna about the feasibility or advisability of launching on the Rajasuya idea in the yesterdays, and who had obtained not merely counsel but also actual help in achieving such a tremendous success, now forgot to consult the same Sri Krishna, while being drawn into this wicked game of dice ! Whether it was ordinary human lapse or an overestimation of his own self confidence, we cannot say. Ever since Veda Vyasa had predicted a World-war at the end of the thirteenth year from the day Sisupala's head rolled down, and with Yudhisthira as the main instrument of it, the down-cast and depressed emperor had taken a vow that he would simply obey his cousins and give no room for dissent or discontent.

e) The disastrous dice not merely deprived the newly crowned Emperor of all his empire, all his wealth and glory, but also exposed his royal wife, Panchali, to the revenge of the Kauravas who sought to disrobe her in the very presence of the tongue-tied common elders of the race ! It is another matter that Sri Krishna saved Draupadi against those vulgar designs by blessing her and while being invisible to others.

f) Sri Krishna comforts the Pandavas in the forests in their exile period, but allows them to suffer, for their own self-purification; and earn blessings of the lesser gods. It is at the end of their exile period, at the instance of sage Markandeya, the Pandavas surrender themselves at Sri Krishna's feet.

g) During the one year stay of the Pandavas, incognito, at Virata Nagar also, Sri Krishna does not meet them, but joins them at the end of that year, to coincide with the occasion of the marriage between Uttara (Virata's daughter) and - Abhimanyu (Arjuna's son).

## 1. Was Sri Krishna Sincere as Peace maker ?

It is thereafter that Sri Krishna's role becomes more prominent as a mediator between the Kauravas and Pandavas, and he tries to avoid the inevitable War. How far was the mediation sincere or effective is a question we have to answer immediately here.

There are a class of admirers of Sri Krishna who praise him as "Kapata nataka sutradhari" i.e., a stage-manager of a play that never was to be, or of a "barren rehearsal" of a play, in so far as he assures Draupadi that her insults and humiliations would fully be avenged by him in the war that would follow, and in the next breath tries to avert that very war, by elaborate speeches to the deaf Kauravas. Some of these admirers go even a step further and say that as God it was Sri Krishna who instigated Duryodhana as his Indweller not to listen to anyone's advice and persist in his foolish refusal to part with half the empire to the Pandavas, to pull him down finally ! This interpretation would spoil the story on the human plane in bringing no unity of behaviour on the part of Sri Krishna as man and diplomat, without attributing any lofty motive for it. In fact it would degrade him to a mean, schemy, foxy, crooked and profitless war-monger, with the destruction of humanity as his only possible motive. This would attribute cynicism to him, which is thoroughly inconsistent with his earlier and later known character. On the other hand, on the Divine plane, it would sketch a pervert conception of God, having determined everything once-for-all in a dismal and rigidly pre-determined outlook of life, reducing humanity to mere puppets in the hands of such a despotic God, and making the daily experienced freedom aspect of life a profound nonsense philosophically. The additional damage is the introduction of the idea of a never-bridgeable chasm or schism between Good and Evil, and the concept of Eternal Hell, which is abhorant and repugnant to all civilised philosophical thinking. The net result is an outlook of hopelessness in life, of cynicism, a sense of total waste looming large everywhere, crushing humanity to needless brooding and a sense of permanent doom - all attributed to Veda Vyasa as the poet, historian, and narrator of the story. People in the past with such an undignified, unelevated view of life, have not hesitated to interpolate verses to this effect into the Epic, and their present day followers

express their unconcealed dismay at not finding those interpolated verses in modern civilised editions of the Epic, without realising the consequences in terms of philosophical and literary absurdities that would then creep into the otherwise natural movement of the story.

Then, is the true story, convincing in its natural sequence? We should say it is, as we shall elaborate below. But before proceeding, there is the need to be warned about an undue mixing up of the human and Divine aspects of Sri Krishna. On the human plane we have a continuous enough and convincing story, and we shall leave the Divine and Spiritual elements and their meaning for a second reading of the Epic on a spiritual or philosophical plane. Where human explanations are available and possible, we should not neglect them for our sudden preferences for supernatural explanations. That is not the literary method and this quackish, hasty method could only bring disrepute to the Epic itself from angles of genuine admiration. Audiences which are superstitiously "devout", ignorant of literary canons, and accustomed to such unconvincing, unexamined interpretations of the Epic have done enough disservice to this great Epic in our country, in all these centuries, and it is time we turn to the lines and pages of the Epic itself for its unsurpassed literary beauties, and the majesty of its plot construction.

We shall begin with this same question which we have to answer one way or the other at the end: Was Sri Krishna really sincere in his peace making efforts? If he was not, then it is futile to try to project him as one, and then all the above mentioned consequences arise, which we will not be able to avoid. The result will be a denigration of Sri Krishna, the Epic itself, and the vision of Vyasa as a poet, historian, philosopher and so on. If on the other hand Sri Krishna was a true and great peace-maker, we have to reconcile the apparently divergent looking utterances and actions attributed to him in the Epic, in terms of convincing human traits, human excellences of thought and action.

The latter course is easier and wiser. We shall now adopt this and show that the world is yet to see an eminent statesman at peace-making efforts, of the order of Sri Krishna.

John Ruskin makes a very complex and almost paradoxical point as the central thesis of his **Crown of the Wild-Olive**. The thesis is that while war is a totally undesirable disaster for mankind, its fear should perpetually hang over humanity, so as to unite them to face that danger and collectively, and so as to bring the best elements in human nature to the surface and bury the animalish instincts deep down under it, or even eliminate it, by pushing grand idealism to the fore and allow the brutally practical human instincts to be buried or erased out of our memory. All great life is the product of the invaluable dreamings of men of great visions and reforming zeal and its sincere efforts. It is our future as we visualise that we realise into our present realities. The clearer that future and the stronger the wish to realise it, the more glorious is our consequent present reality. It is not the past that dictates the present, as in mere meaningless mechanical causation; that is left to the lot of inanimate nature or life that is not much evolved and remains at the mere, instinctive level. It would be a tragedy beyond our words if our present succumbed to the unalterable past, with no one to redeem it and restore it to any meaning or significance.

The possibility of war could be one such magical catalyst, redeeming life into new dimensions of meaning and values of life. Undoubtedly this is perhaps the greatest paradox we can ever have! But so it is, very truly, very strangely the fact. "The man that does not know when to die, does not know how to live!!" The quality of self - sacrifice is perhaps the greatest human virtue, and the situation of a war is one of its true promoters, or generators~ This was the atmosphere of the days of Mahabharatha, and whatever aspect of the Epic we try to analyse, we must remember this always in the background of our minds.

Sri Krishna himself was a great Warrior, and perhaps, the greatest of the Age. He was also the wisest and spiritually deeply matured among contemporary statesmen. He was also the most skilful diplomat, and the most selfless and tireless social worker of the age, holding the destinies of millions in his hands. If he turned peacemaker, it was not because he was afraid of war, or was incapable of it. It was the strange case of a diplomat who wanted to enforce peace with the threat of the alternative of war that would reduce even the

worst warmongers into dust ! His main argument was that even peace-lovers and peace-breakers alike would have to lick dust, if they did not heed his advice and warning, and refused to come to an honourable agreement.

Draupadi was humiliated in that august assembly of the mightiest and wisest stalwarts of the age. That was not a mere isolated incident. It was a mere taste of the standard of morals and principles on their unhindered downward degradation, What happened to her - to a crowned empress in the presence of her helpless husbands - might easily happen to millions of - helpless women in the lower orders of society. Indeed there was no saying that they did not happen daily in the state under Duryodhana and his vulgar supporters. The divine poet does not report any, however, for fear, perhaps, of deviating into side stories. Draupadi was a symbol of womanhood.

What was needed was not a mere personal assurance of her fulfilment of pledge (however horrible and brutal it would now look, after the lapse of so many millenia) but a final guarantee that it never again happened to any other woman. Someone had to put a ceiling to such barbaric misbehaviour of the rulers, who were expected themselves ironically to be the custodians of the chivalry that they so grossly betrayed. The spirit of that assurance is what one needs to read between the lines of the comforting words of Sri Krishna to Draupadi, when he meets her after her humiliation at the hands of Duhssasana, in the forest.

Let us follow the sequences and contexts of Sri Krishna's words in this situation.

After the Pandavas left for the forest, Sri Krishna visits them in the company of Yadava chiefs. Sri Krishna gets thoroughly depressed at the sight of humiliated and deceived Pandavas whom he had so painstakingly installed as Samrat only a short while ago and his anger against the evil doers wells up in these words :

"The earth will no doubt drink the blood of Duryodhana, Karna, Shakuni and Dussasana. We shall kill them and their supporters in war, and after winning over them let us all crown Dharmaraja. The deceivers must be executed, as that is the Ancient Law of Dharma."<sup>2</sup>

These words do not look like those of our latter-day pacifists, Eastern as well as Western, who would advocate peace at the cost of honour, peace with evil forces, compromise with wickedness, and in short peace that supports Evil and surrenders to it! Dhritarashtra also wanted peace on the terms that his sons should not be disturbed from the throne of power, and advocating that begging would be preferable for the Pandavas rather than go to war with Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and the evil Duryodhana whom they all supported!!<sup>3</sup> This was exactly the kind of 'peace' that Arjuna too advocate in the first Chapter of the Gita, and prefers to the war that would root out the Evil, threatening a more lasting peace. In our own times Mahatma Gandhi was such an indiscriminate votary of peace and non-violence, irrespective of the challenging contexts of life, prescribing the same solution to all the problems of the world. Louis Fischer has recorded in his biography of Gandhi, that the solution the Mahatma offered to the Jews of Germany facing extinction of their race under Hitler's daily massacres, was that the Jews ought, collectively, to commit suicide to awaken the World's conscience! When a Western correspondent who was shocked to hear this from the Mahatma asked whether this was practicable or efficacious, the Mahatma is said to have retorted that anyhow the Jews were facing extinction, one way or another!! How unbelievably nonsensical, particularly from the mouth of the Mahatma, as these words emanated !!! People who take this cowardly notion of peace as the only standard for peace, would certainly find it hard to understand Sri Krishna as a Peace Maker. Earl Bertrand Russell prescribed a similar solution to the British Government that was desperately fighting Hitler for survival in the Second World War. He opposed conscription of youngsters into the British Army and squatted before the Buckingham Palace protesting in the Gandhian non-violent manner. If the British Government had yielded to him, Hitler would have mastered the whole world and a different other kind of peace might have prevailed in the world by now. Jainism and Buddhism too advocate a similar idea of peace with their profound contempt for the realities of life, and its central situation of an eternal fight between Good and Evil forces in the thoughts feelings and actions of all living things. Christianity which advocates our turning of the other cheek to any one who hits us on one cheek, is no better, and great Western

thinkers have described such philosophies as 'grand programmes for the annihilation of all life.'<sup>4</sup> But it has become a fashion to understand peace still in this passive sense only and hence Sri Krishna's sense of it requires elaborate explanations.

Sri Krishna's philosophy of peace is to be understood and appreciated in the entire context of the Vedic-Vedantic teaching about a heroic life with honour, self-respect and other noble values of life rooted firm at its heart. Life is no static moment stretched infinitely between the past and future. It is an eternal flow, with every moment being a battle-ground between Good and Evil, and our choices and actions being the result of our throwing our lots with the one or the other of them once for all. There is no true, lasting non-alignment in this outlook of life as Devasura Yuddha, and every moment is a Sandhya - a meeting point - whose significance should never be lost sight of by one who believes in the wisdom of the Vedas. Sri Krishna was a matchless interpreter of that true and ancient Religion of the Aryas and an embodiment of its wisdom and virtues. He never advocated the Peace of the coward, or the Peace that resulted by a compromise with evil as a sepulchral kind of peace, if the Gita is to be taken as his word. This creed of the Aryan fighter who was prepared to lay down his life for the cause of honourable and fearless peace is described by Aurobindo very beautifully in a chapter in his Essays on the Gita: <sup>5</sup>

"War, said Heraclitus, is the father of all things, War is the King of all; and the saying, like most of the apothegms of the Greek thinker, suggests a profound truth. From a clash of material or other forces, everything in this world, if not the world itself, seems to be born; by a struggle of forces, tendencies, principles, beings, it seems to proceed, ever creating new things, ever destroying the old, marching, one knows not very well, whither, . . . in progressive cycles, is the most optimistic conclusion, leading through whatever trouble and apparent confusion towards a higher and higher approximation to some divine apocalypse."<sup>5</sup> "Evil cannot perish without the destruction of much that lives by the evil."<sup>6</sup> "Self-sacrifice is great and noble, but at its highest it is an acknowledgement of the law of life by death and becomes an offering on the altar of some Power that demands a victim in



order that the work desired may be done.”<sup>7</sup> “A day may come, must surely come, we will say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, for the reign of universal peace, meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion.”<sup>8</sup>

Such is the Vedic Vedantic visualisation of the hard realities of life, and its eternal situation, that it acts as an invigourating tonic on the effeminate religious and ethical sentimentalism of the modern advocates of peace who allow life neither to live nor die heroically. These other alternative views of life lead, ultimately, only to different forms of cowardice, inaction and confusion, leading only to shame and the grave.

Sri Krishna's words to the Pandavas and to Draupadi should be understood only in the sense of the most concerned statesman, who was determined to clear the political mess of the age only to pave the way for a lasting new peace. If it required a penalty in terms of the life and blood of those who had caused that mess and wanted to perpetuate it for ever, as a premium, why deny this unavoidable process of a purely operational value? It is no more than the function of a surgeon who sheds some blood of his patient while removing an overgrowth in his body for a better, healthier, longer lasting life of peace and prosperity of the concerned patient. It is absurd to object to it; is it not!

So the final assessment of Sri Krishna's role in this matter is that of a man who wanted peace, but was prepared for war, in case the powers that be did not listen to his advice. He knew by experience that the wicked Four (Dhushta Chatushtaya) would not listen to any healthy advice by anyone. He had to eliminate them as hurdles on the way to lasting and meaningful peace. Whether this was to be by war only or any other simpler method was the only choice to be decided. This was the main thing he wanted to decide for himself during that famous embassy episode. But the chances were that the evil forces were gathering and gaining strength and momentum. This had started right from the moment of driving the Pandavas to exile. This is why Sri Krishna assures Draupadi boiling with the humiliations heaped on her, in the very presence of her helpless husbands:-

“Oh, great lady! Those against whom you are so enraged will one day be laid down to earth in their own blood, being covered by the arrows of your husband who is literally the - “terrible” (Bibhtsu), and their wives will weep then as you are now doing, loudly, after seeing their dear husbands rolling down in the dust. I shall do but only the justice that befits the (much suffered) Pandavas. I swear unto you, lady, you will shortly become the Grand Queen of queens. Heavens may fall; the Himavan might blow away; the Earth may split into pieces; the oceans may dry themselves, oh! lady Krishnaa! But my assurances will never become false or empty in effect.”<sup>9</sup>

This is also the spirit in which he tells Sanjaya, the messenger of Dhritarashtra, his final reply, at the end of that false move to commit the Pandavas again to exile and beggary in the name of peace, as planned by the blind old wicked King :

“I have to discharge this debt of Draupadi grown with compound interest, locked up in my heart, and cannot be dislodged. That debt arose at that miserable and helpless moment when she sought for my help by calling me “Govinda”, although I was far, far away, then from her, (and could not save her that humiliation altogether.)<sup>10</sup>

Sanjaya describes these firmly delivered grave and straight words of Sri Krishna as troubling to the sons of Dhritarashtra, spoken with softness though terrible in effect; words that emanated from one who deserved to be worshipped in words, words of one well trained in the art of phonetics, grammar, accentuation and Rhetoric, words that delivered the sense dear to the heart of the speaker and stole the hearts of the listeners.”<sup>11</sup>

These were words that had the full backing of all the Pandavas, particularly Arjuna that day, who was seated sharing the same seat of Sri Krishna, as the terror-struck Sanjaya saw it on that unique occasion!

Had Sri Krishna already not decided about the War then? No, we must reply. These words have that appearance of a finality, however, because only of the firm and shrewd anticipation on the part of Sri Krishna of what the Kauravas would prefer in the last analysis. It is knowledge by unerring inference, and not by a precipitate act of pre-determination of

one who wanted a war for the sake of war! A veritable War-monger should have refused to examine all ways and means open to a durable and honourable peace, and encouraged elements towards destructive clashes at every available opportunity. But this is not what Sri Krishna does. He is only healing the wounds of the hurt and the humiliated by the assurances calculated on the basis of inevitable realities, still hoping against hope that there would still be a last minute opportunity to avoid the calamity.

Suppose after giving the kind of assurance that he did to Panchali, Sri Krishna was really able to bring the Kauravas and the Pandavas to a settlement, and the oppressed Pandavas were able to regain their lost share of Empire, what would happen to those assurances? - one may ask.

This is a difficult proposition to answer. (1) In the first place there was no likelihood of the Kauravas changing their minds or characters. This was the entire basis of Sri Krishna's assurance. (2) If Bhishma, Drona and other neutral elders were, by chance, able to bring about a rapprochement at all, without the active involvement of Duryodhana, but compelling Dhritarashtra somehow, then that assurance given to Draupadi would mean that Sri Krishna had alternative plans to eliminate the principal culprits in the attempt to disrobe Draupadi, who were now not active signatories to that peace-plan, somehow, so as to make it all look natural. An able visionary and statesman would not risk history repeat itself, and the determination for a change, smooth or otherwise was already made in favour of a lasting peace. That was all. (3) If by any chance Duryodhana also changed, repented, surrendered and agreed to serve under Yudhishthira as Emperor, by being contented with anything short of it, or had granted one half of the empire gained by that deceitful gamble, or in any such other eventuality, what would happen to that assurance? We can only guess a chance answer for a chance question, and hazard it as follows : he would perhaps have persuaded Draupadi for a complete forgiveness. This was not out of tune with Draupadi's true nature, as many might think. There is a remarkable incident to show this in her nature, after the bloody war was over, and Aswatthama brutally, and cold-bloodedly murdered all the five sleeping sons of Draupadi, in their camp. Arjuna runs after this child-killer and brings him

hands and feet bound by ropes, like a brute. Even Sri Krishna urges upon Arjuna not to spare this wicked Brahmin-brute, and calls upon him to execute him, and justifies this with scriptural sanctions. But Arjuna had second thoughts about this, as it meant killing a preceptor's son, though he was a murderer now. Draupadi who peeps out of the camp, catches a glimpse of this grotesque situation, and being moved by mercy, and prompted by her natural clemency, and usual respect for Drona, "bows down to this murderer"!<sup>12</sup> Would you believe this behaviour of a warrior woman whose children had just then been killed in a cold-blooded fashion by such a heartless brute, no matter who he was, or how great and near his father to her? But that is what Veda Vyasa himself relates! Further she orders the release of Aswatthama on the grounds of his being a Brahmin, and as the very reincarnation of that great teacher Drona, from whom her husbands- particularly Arjuna - had learnt all varied esoteric tricks of archery.<sup>13</sup> It was Sri Krishna's turn now to be surprised! He concurs with her and asks Arjuna to give weight to her view, and be content to cut his hair off, to symbolise Aswatthama's death and dispossess him of that gem on his head that was there from his birth.

This shows that Panchali had a pliant nature and not an adamant one, being plentifully possessed of mercy naturally. She was born of Fire, no doubt, but not made of that stuff, as ignorant and illiterate passers - on of the story have often made out to their credulous listeners. Sri Krishna was also not a blood-for-blood type of revengeful, vulgar, politician. His was a politics of lofty vision and purpose, and he could overlook hasty decisions and assurances not meant to be carried out literally.

So, various possibilities were still open to Sri Krishna, and he was in no hurry for a closed decision.

There is still one more consideration. What were the circumstances in which Sri Krishna undertook his mission of peace to the royal court of the Kurus? We shall see.

## **2. Sri Krishna as a missionary of Peace**

Sri Krishna had sent word to Dhritarashtra through Sanjaya that polity for a ruler meant a duty - Dharma - whether - involving or noninvolving a War :

**“Rajnam Yudhe Vartate Dharmatantram  
ayuddhe va vartate Dharmatantram”**

What does this ambiguous policy mean? Sri Krishna himself answers that it was the ancient Law that Brahmins should live by teaching, sacrifices, charity etc., and that a Warrior should live by offering protection to all peaceful practitioners of their vocations entrusted to his care as a ruler and so forth. He had to be ever vigilant, and be equal to all his people. But when some tried to grab the properties hard-earned by others, and by force, or by cunning methods, then indeed arose the need for bows, arrows, shields. The Vedas say that Indra got these generated for the destruction of culture-haters, and anti-civilisation forces.<sup>15</sup> There is not much difference between a thief thieving things in the presence or absence of witnesses.<sup>16</sup> Duryodhana is one such, and that is all. Besides, there are plenty of witnesses in this case, none of whom ever tried to prevent it, except Vidura. Even now it is not late to patch up the breach by returning to Pandavas their dues. Dhritarashtra and his sons are like a forest, with the Pandavas as the tigers in it, or lions. If the lions are killed, then the forest is exposed to the firwood-makers, who will destroy it, no doubt. If, on the other hand there is no forest, the lions are left without a hide out. Hence peace must prevail.<sup>17</sup>

This is Sri Krishna's first message of peace, on the condition that Pandavas get justice at the hands of Dhritarashtra. He has no alternative proposals for this peace and its terms at this stage, other than war, as can be clearly noted here.

This is reinforced by the similar messages of all the Five Brothers individually, sent to the Blind Old King through the same messenger. But the messenger fails to have any impact on the arrogant, power-drunk rulers of Hastinavati. Yudhishtira even reduces his demand from his full share of kingdom to a mere five villages, Avisthala, Vrikasthala, Makandi, Varanavata and Avasana, (perhaps round about Indraprastha) as he is bound by the law of Varna to live as a Kashtriya and not as a beggar or a Brahmin. But this is also rejected by the Kauravas. What alternative to War could then be expected?

Yudhishtira, who temperamentally loves peace is now terribly worried over the future prospects of the human race, at

this only alternative left for him. Resorting to Sri Krishna as his only refuge as counsellor and guide, he requests that he may be guided to a better reality through this present danger. Everything now depended on him, and the advice that Sri Krishna gave.

Sri Krishna offers to carry out the wishes of the worried prince, whatever it may be. Then Yudhishtira bursts out into a profound condemnation of the Warrior's role in life as of bloody slaughter, as he is confronted by, at the present. He decries the materialist's craze to accumulate property and wealth as enunciated by Shambara, the Demon King and Economist, at the cost of the rest of the world. This is because he is sure of victory in the event of a war with his cousins, but the decision of that war is now entirely his, and his own! He ridicules the warrior as no better than the fish that eats its own kin, and the dog that kills its own kind! But, at the same time, he is aware that the peace, that follows this holocaust is really more lasting than the present lull mistaken for it by fools.<sup>19</sup> He is really unable to decide, though History is now entirely in his own hands to make! Hence he requests Sri Krishna to decide for him.

It is at this strange juncture that Sri Krishna, on his own, offers to mediate again, by going to the royal court of the Blind old Emperor, as the emissary of the Pandavas, to make one more last effort to avoid the calamity of War, although such a result was very remotely a likelihood. The world should not blame him or the Pandavas of any hasty decision of War. More time must certainly be given for that final consideration. The world and the future history, must know who really wanted that war, and the blame must really be laid at the proper doors that closed the option to avoid bloodshed. Sri Krishna had not yet personally heard from Dhritarashtra or his stubborn and stupid son what their decision was; it is well that that decision, whatever it may be, is recorded in history by the wisest visionary of the age, Veda Vyasa. With all these weighty considerations, Sri Krishna decides voluntarily to undertake that celebrated attempt at mediation.<sup>20</sup> In case peace is possible on Dharmaraja's condition, it is his good luck, and the results will be beneficial to all the Kurus and other princes of the age, as it would alone release them from the inevitable death trap.

(Intelligent readers of the Epic should now answer for themselves whether a true war-monger could ever speak in this way, or do what Sri Krishna has undertaken to do! From what follows later on, that appellation would better fit Duryodhana who was hell-bent on war at any cost, and rejected all counter proposals.)

It is strange to note that even Dharmaputra prevents Sri Krishna from undertaking this mission! What Duryodhana would say or prefer was a foregone conclusion, and known to everyone. Besides, there was danger to Sri Krishna's own life.

To this Sri Krishna replies that he too is well aware of the possibilities, given Duryodhana's wickedness of character, and that his only anxiety is to put the blame on him for this preference of war, and avoid it on themselves - *avachyastu bhavishyamañ*. Then Yudhisthira gives a free and full mandate to Sri Krishna to decide then and there, in that royal court, what may be in the best interests of all involved and the larger humanity.

Sri Krishna hints at what he would avoid at all costs: reducing the Pandavas into the profession of beggars, as it is against all law, all ethical codes and even commonsense practice or wisdom. There is no life without honour or dignity, and this he would never compromise, he says. His mission would also expose those sitting on the fence, or with a hypocritical behaviour - men like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and others. The mission was more for tactical achievements rather than for any substantial results. It was to expose those who took shelter under the excuse of *Dharma Sankata* - a crisis in their sense of duty - and to win them over if possible, and if not, throw them into an irresolvable conflict, that this mission was undertaken!<sup>21</sup> This would be the net diplomatic achievement, a moral offensive to nullify those who would be otherwise Duryodhana's architects of that undesirable victory on his side, should there be a War.

This shows Sri Krishna as a practical-minded diplomat who was constantly attempting to make gains on the side of the wronged Pandavas. The last attempt of Peace would be made to implicate the head-strong Kauravas in the foolish decision of war, and make them entirely responsible for it, while attempting gains for the Pandavas, on grounds as argued above. But the

results were well known in advance, though Sri Krishna, for his part was absolutely sincere in his efforts.

It is surprising that at this juncture even the irrepressible and volcanic Bhima prefers peace and exile again! It is like a mountain becoming a light-weight, or like fire becoming ice-cold in touch!<sup>22</sup> A Warrior that expected war anxiously all these years and slept on his stomach pressed down to the earth not to allow it to explode with agony or sorrow, speaking so now is very strange for Sri Krishna, indeed, and to any one who knows his fiery temperament. This is too much for Panchali to bear, when all the other brothers support Bhima's view of peace with dishonour and perpetual insult and shame.

So she implores Sri Krishna that justice must be done to her, and her humiliators must be brogugt to books and punished. It is overinterpretation to mistake her words as insistence on vengeance. Let us remember that she had a vow to fulfil; that her hair would again be wound and smoothed only after vanquishing and destroying those humiliators. Sri Krishna had considered it as his own vow, and had vouched that he would fulfil it himself, one day. That was about thirteen years ago, in the forests. Had everyone, including Sri Krishna forgotten it! She remembers her scenes of humiliation very vividly, and re-lives those moments nightmarishly and is mad with agony and anguish; what use is Arjuna's Divine Bow, Gandiva? What use is Bhima's prowess? If Duryodhana has still to live, and Pandavas agree to live as mendicants, and peace is possible on these dishonourable terms, it should be rejected, she argues. She holds her dishevelled hair, beautiful to look at and anointed with the most aromatic hair-oils once upon a time, but now dust-gathering and looking like a bunch of serpents, in her left hand, and with tear-filled eyes says to Sri Krishna: "Oh lotus-eyed one! remember this hair, whatever your decision may be, and whatever the circumstances, when you go to make peace. In case a dishonourable peace is arrived at, my old father, my brothers, my five sons and Abhimanyu and others will wage that war so avoided by Bhima and Arjuna, now all too eager for peace on any terms. They will cut off that shoulder of Duhssasana, that dragged me and my anointed hair into the court, as if I was a whore, and sought to disrobe me in the presence of those cowardly elders, and make it roll in the dust." After saying so



she wept and cried loudly, and her body convulsed and shook with sorrow pent up all those years. This is a scene too touching to read or narrate indeed. Draupadi did not realise that the mission of Sri Krishna had a different political significance in so far as it was calculated to bring more friends for the Pandavas, and break up the enemy-camp irreparably. It was a widely publicised diplomatic mission meant to strengthen public opinion in favour of the right cause of the Pandavas, and sterilize the War-enthusiasm of the greatest and mightiest heroes on the enemy's side. Peace was already ruled out by the evil rulers and none could alter that decision, given Duryodhana's known stubborn insistence on War. Yet he wanted to transfer this blame on to the shoulders of the five brothers, with his father's blessings, and his earlier message through Sanjaya. Now Sri Krishna's present diplomatic move was to transfer it back on to the evil shoulders where it really belonged. That was all. Sri Krishna repeats his oath to her again, and comforts her to remain assured that the inevitable would really happen. There is no cunningness of Sri Krishna or any behind-the-scene type of treacherous plot involved in all this! It is merely an unerring logical view of what would turn up, given some types of people involved in that ruinous decision-making.

So Sri Krishna sets out on his errand to the Royal Court of the Kauravas, in the year 3068 B.C., in the month of Karthika, the day being a Dwadashi in the bright half of the month, and the star being Revathi on that day, as Veda Vyasa says. It was in the maitra-muhurtha (i.e. between 7.36 AM to 8.24 AM) that he left Upaplavya the hamlet near about Virata's Capital. The journey took three days, as he reaches Hastinavati in the star of Bharani.

### 3. Sri Krishna at the Royal Court

It is ironical that Sri Krishna who had first suggested that an ambassador who hails from a dignified family well-known for character, clean of hands, of mind and character, careful and able and wedded to Dharma<sup>23</sup> be sent to Duryodhana for a final settlement one way or the other, was himself to be that final ambassador! But Sri Krishna also had heard the wise Drupada say at that time that Duryodhana deserved some strong and forceful speaking and not mild words as Balarama had suggested. After all a donkey was a donkey and a cow a

cow! Speaking mildly to Duryodhana was as misplaced and ridiculous as being kind to a donkey and harsh on a cow!<sup>24</sup>

So Sri Krishna does a very interesting thing now while setting out to Duryodhana's Court! He orders all his weapons to be loaded into his Chariot-his famous Discus, Conch, his wonderful Mace, various Shaktis and special other weapons.<sup>25</sup>

Let us remember that he had already promised his army's help to Duryodhana, and his personal presence on the side of the Pandavas, without his bearing or using of any weapons, doing service as a mere charioteer to Arjuna!<sup>26</sup>

That was in the eventuality of war, and while Duryodhana was trying to gather vast armies, in the first step. Now that war was almost a certainty! As per Sri Krishna's vow he would have to avoid using his weapons in that war now. Besides his was a mere peaceful mission for Peace! So where was the need for all these weapons? - one might ask.

Sri Krishna hints about his intentions in a casual way: "Duryodhana is an evil minded fellow, so are Karna and Sakuni; we should not underestimate their wicked capacities or possibilities."<sup>27</sup>

Sri Krishna must have expected some sinister move by the opposite camp, and the carrying of these special weapons was not merely in self-defence, but for meeting any emergent situation then and there. Satyaki would be with him in the role of a charioteer. For other normal occasions there was that other usual charioteer, Daruka. The taking of Satyaki, whose powers of archery was next only to that of Sri Krishna himself, was by itself significant! It might be to show that Sri Krishna was ready for war, if a mini-war took place, then and there, as was indeed very likely, and it would be well to eliminate this wicked cactus of four - the Dushta Chatushtaya and not touch the others. This was Sri Krishna's favourite method of elimination of evil, removing the nucleus of trouble directly, and leave the rest of their followers, if harmless, alive. That was how he had handled Jarasandha, and Sishupala. That would also avoid an unnecessary war and its inevitable bad consequences on innocent and neutral masses.

Then why did he not use those weapons and punish anyone there?

As we shall see, Sri Krishna must have realised that the mere removal of a nucleus was not enough this time. The sight of the full court, the might that Duryodhana had gathered, the help that had been promised to him, as he knew from Vidura in detail, and the conviction that the misguided and brain-washed elders like Bhishma and Drona would be on the side of Duryodhana etc, must have changed Sri Krishna's mind, decisively.

So he leaves for that Royal Court with an open mind, fully prepared for all situations, and receiving full attention everywhere as he moved on, and the mission getting wide publicity. This was another intended move of diplomacy, to build up a strong public opinion against war, and weaken, thereby, the minds of the real, potential war-mongers. Duryodhana's attempt to win over Sri Krishna on his own side, as he did Shalya earlier, was not successful. Sri Krishna did not even look at the elaborate and pompous rest-camps that had been erected in his favour on his way. He had his own arrangements made by the common folk, with whom he preferred to stay, avoiding wastage of public-exchequer. Sri Krishna refused even the royal stay at Duryodhana's Capital, so elaborately, so carefully, so mischievously planned by him. Vidura's final warning that Sri Krishna would better be pleased by obeying his words of wisdom, fell on the deaf ears of the Blind King.

The expected mental pressure had already been built up on Duryodhana's mind, by this time. That Sri Krishna had refused royal hospitality was the talk of the whole town, with even the neutral elders subjecting Duryodhana to tremendous pressures, and angering him. He did not even want to offer the customary royal gifts, as usual, as that would be mistaken for a flexibility of mind on his part. Bhishma who was infuriated beyond words this time, had walked off in a huff from the royal Court; a thing that had never before happened! Sri Krishna's choice to stay with Vidura had resulted in a complete loss of face for the entire camp of Duryodhana, as was wisely calculated by Sri Krishna, earlier. These were all a series of master diplomatic moves with deadly effects.

On that first day's visit by Sri Krishna to the royal court there was a mere royal reception, a ceremonial procession en-route

to the palace, and preliminary exchanges of formal greetings. Regular transaction was scheduled for the next one or two days. A mere glance at the assembly convinced Sri Krishna, perhaps, that a time for a full-scale war had come, and that it was futile to avoid it. It was a show of strength on the part of Duryodhana, well organised.

Duryodhana too makes a diplomatic move to demoralise Sri Krishna, which recoils on himself, however! He invites Sri Krishna for a royal lunch, as is usual on such occasions, knowing fully well, that it would be refused. The idea was to expose Sri Krishna's partiality for the Five Brothers, and show his disqualification as a neutral peace maker, that he was supposed to be. The reply of Sri Krishna exposes Duryodhana himself as a hell-bent war-monger, head-strong with unjustified hatred for his cousins from his very birth. Sri Krishna makes it known unmistakably to the world of assembled princes that his love for the Pandavas is a reasoned one and based on their love of Truth, good character, endurance, self-sacrifice and other rare virtues. It is the commonsense love of good people for good qualities. There is no partiality in it, as suggested by Duryodhana, at all. Sri Krishna also quotes the age-honoured rules for the conduct and behaviour of royal messengers on such occasions, that they should neither feed their enemies, nor be fed by them, until an honourable settlement is arrived at. A confused and confounded Duryodhana challenges to know how he is Sri Krishna's enemy, and the wise statesman answers that as Pandavas are no more than his five breaths, a hatred for them amounts to hating him who really breathes through those breaths! There is thus a body-soul relationship between them and him. Duryodhana is rendered speechless and blind with rage, fumbles for words and fails.

Veda Vyasa reports that when Sri Krishna spoke, he spoke so that his words could not be made light of, (*alaghu-kritam*) with no eclipsed meanings making room for mistakes, (*agrastam*), words that could not be refuted (*anirastam*), words that were delivered slowly but steadily into the hearts of the listeners (*asankulam*), words that were backed by reason and well argued ideas (*hetumat*), and chosen well (*uttamam*).<sup>29</sup>

That night, when Sri Krishna returns to his camp at Vidura's, he is warned by the latter about the inadvisability of pursuing this

peace mission any longer. "It is all one to the wicked, whether you speak well or ill; it is like music on unmusical or deaf years!"<sup>30</sup>

Sri Krishna's breath-taking reply stuns even Vidura: "I know all this that you say about Duryodhana; but my efforts are not to save him, but the rest of the innocent world from the clutches and claws of Death; from the very jaws of Death, to which he is forcing these innocent people. It is my duty and the great law of life (dharma) to save all that can be saved. If I do not try this, the evil tongues will later on put the blame on me for not having averted this fratricidal war, although I was capable of it, as they think. I have come really as friend to both camps. If the Kauravas would only listen to my words based deeply and extensively on Dharma, words rich in ideas or polity and public-well-being, and words wedded to non-violence, all the merit of averting this calamity would be mine."<sup>31</sup>

These clear words should now leave none in any doubt about the intentions of Sri Krishna as a Peace-maker as we have elaborately argued so far. It was an effort not merely to save lives of men, horses and elephants, but avoid economic wastage that was disastrous for an otherwise prosperous civilization.

Sri Krishna entertained no anxiety or illusion about anything and so went into sound sleep that night, reports Vyasa.

The next day was the crucial day for the history of the mankind of those days. Duryodhana and Sakuni come to take Sri Krishna to their court in the early morning when Sri Krishna is in the middle of morning worship (Sandhya). After finishing all the routine at leisure, and worshipping Agni and the holy Brahmins, Sri Krishna accompanies them in a separate chariot. The reception is glorious beyond description. Vidura stealthily checks up the seat offered to Sri Krishna to find that it is safe, and fit for occupation. Everybody is plunged in a meaningful and anxious silence.

Sri Krishna traces out the glory of the Kuru race and points out the propriety to which rulers of that race were bound by law and commonsense. It is not wise to reject a proposal for peace, when there is an honourable one, especially when the only alternative is deadly for all mankind, and not merely to the

cousins of the race. Pandavas are invincible in war even by gods, and let there be no illusion about the outcome in a war, should there be one. It is in the hands of Duryodhana to save the entire world here and now. Pandavas have endured with unspeakable hardships this suffering for long, from birth. Duryodhana was in no small measure the main cause of their sufferings. Even the 'neutral' ones must speak now their hearts, if they want to avoid the consequences of adharma on themselves and others.

Then he addresses the blind king to hold his son under his own control. This is when Duryodhana makes no reply. But the blind king also puts the blame on his son, and tries to take shelter under his helplessness.

Sri Krishna turns to Duryodhana again and exhausts all wisdom in advising him. Bhishma, Drona and others join Sri Krishna at this point and advise Duryodhana.

This is too much for the foolish Duryodhana and now he retorts; Why should every one blame him only, and advise him only? he asks. Was it not Dharmaraja who voluntarily gambled away his everything at dice? Why not blame him for his self-made miserable plight? His peace-mission now would only mean his helplessness, and inability to gather forces or fight. Even Bhishma and Drona are on his own side, and he is therefore not afraid of Pandavas or their might as exaggerated by Sri Krishna. For that matter, even the earlier division of the empire and giving half of it to Yudhishthira was illegal, and was done when he was a 'minor' legally, and done without his consent. Thus there is no question of repeating that wrong, simply because it was done once, wrongly.

Sri Krishna ridicules the unjustness of this argument by pointing out that wealth won by gamble ill-befits heroes, as it is against justice. Anything can happen in a gamble and no significance can be attached to the winner morally. It involves no powers, no wisdom, no effort, and no justice, and it is all mad lottery. Why does not Duryodhana remember his attempt to disrobe Draupadi? Was it also part of the gamble? Was there no deliberate spite and plan in all this clear humiliation of the Pandavas? Would any gentleman resort to such obscene tactics? Would the world forget his earlier attempt to burn the Pandavas alive with their much-suffered mother? Was this not

deliberate murder? How can Duryodhana now pretend he is free from fault and beyond advice?

At this point when Duryodhana was silenced and exposed in that august assembly, Dussasana tells his brother that if something urgent is not done, the pressurised Blind king might be forced to bind his hands and feet and hand him off prisoner to the Pandavas. The same would be the fate of his principal supporters too!

Duryodhana walks out of the assembly on his advice with great disrespect to Sri Krishna.

Sri Krishna warns that the fate of Kamsa and his fellows was in store for the ill-behaved prince of this family. When the life of a race is at stake, because of the faults of one man, wisdom would expect the sacrificing of that man in the interests of a whole community. So why not arrest these four wicked - Duryodhana, Karna, Sakuni and Dussasana, and hand them over to Yudhishtira!

Dhritarashtra is unable to decide on it in his blind love for his son! he sends for his queen Gandhari and seeks her view publicly. She orders her son back into the court and advises him too. When he refuses to listen, she squarely blames her husband for having pampered this wicked son all these days.

Duryodhana again quits the hall in protest with his advisers, and comes back after consultation among his fellows mutually, this time, to arrest Sri Krishna himself and throw him into the prison! Satyaki had expected this, and orders Kritavarma, who had followed him with a whole army, to get ready to fight the Kauravas then and there, as they were still unprepared. The peace-mission thus reaches its anti-climax in the attempt to kidnap that greatest statesman of the world! Sri Krishna reveals his divinity and the vision of all the worlds in him. What follows is beyond the political understanding of the episode.

Thus a grand attempt to avert a world-war is brought to nothing by the foolish insistence of the rulers of the day. The only gain for Sri Krishna was to have avoided the blame for it on himself, and let it fall where it really belonged. Strategically it was a successful mission, with the results being a foregone conclusion for anyone who has the common sense to anticipate it.

## Chapter 2

### 1. Vyasa's Prediction :-

त्रयोदश समा राजन् ! उत्पातानां फलं महत् ।  
सर्वक्षत्रविनाशाय भविष्यति विशाम्पते ॥  
त्वामेकं कारणं कृत्वा कालेन भरतर्षभ ।  
समेतं पार्थिवं क्षत्रं क्षयं यास्यति भारत ॥ (सभा - ४६-११, १२)

### Yudhisthira's vow :-

अद्यप्रभृति भद्रं वः प्रतिज्ञां मे नीबोधत ।  
त्रयोदश समास्तात को ममार्थोऽस्ति जीवतः ॥  
न प्रवक्ष्यामि परुषं भ्रातृनन्यांश्च पार्थिवान् ।  
स्थितो निदेशे ज्ञातीनां योक्ष्ये तत् समुदाहरन् ॥

२. दुर्योधनस्य कर्णस्य शकुनेश्च दुरात्मनः ।  
दःशासनचतुर्थानां भूमिः पास्यति शोणितम् ॥  
एतान् निहत्य समरे ये च तस्य पदानुगाः ।  
तांश्च सर्वान् विनिर्जित्य सहितान् सनराधिपान् ॥  
ततः सर्वेऽभिषिञ्चामो धर्मराजं युधिष्ठिरम् ।  
निकृत्योपचरन् वध्य एष धर्मः सनातनः ॥ (Yana, 12-5 to7)

३. Udyoga Parvan 25, and 27 Chapters in details.

४. A. N. Whitehead : Adventures of Ideas, pp.44-45.  
"But in practice there has always been the temptation to abandon the immediate experience of this world as a lost cause.....The mystical religion which most whole-heartedly adopts this attitude is Buddhism. In it, despair of this world is conjoined with a programme for the world's abolition by a mystic tranquillity. Christianity has wavered between Buddhistic renunciation and its own impracticable ideals culminating in a crude Millenium within the temporal flux"

५. Essays on the Gita, pp. 52,53



६. Ibid p.56

७. Ibid p.58

८. Ibid p.65

९. रोदिष्यन्ति स्त्रियो ह्येवं येषां क्रुध्दासि भाविनि ।  
वीभत्सुशरसंभिन्नान् शोणितौघपरित्पुतान् ॥  
निहतान् वल्लभान् वीक्ष्य शयानान् वसुघातले ।  
यत् समर्थं पाण्डवानां तत् करिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥  
सत्यं ते प्रतिजानामि राज्ञां राज्ञी भविष्यसि ।  
पतेत् द्यौः हिमवान् शीर्येत् पृथिवी शकली भवेत् ॥  
शुष्येत् तोयनिधिः कृष्णे न मे मोघं वचो भवेत् ।

(Vana, 12-128 to 131)

१०. ऋणमेतत् प्रवृद्धं मे हृदयात्रापसर्पति ।  
यद् गोविन्देति चुक्रोश कृष्णा मां दूरवासिनम् ॥

११. त्रासिनीं धार्तराष्ट्राणां मृदुपूर्वां सुदारूणां ।  
वाचं तां वचनार्हस्य शिक्षाक्षरसमन्वितां ॥  
अश्रौषमहमिष्टार्हा पश्चाद्धृदयहारिणीं ॥

१२. तथाहतं पशुवत् पाशबद्धं  
अवाङ्मुखं कर्मजुगुप्सितेन ।  
निरीक्ष्य कृष्णापकृतं गुरोःसुतं  
वामस्वभावा कृपया ननाम च ॥ (Sri Bhagavatam I-7-42)

१३. मुच्यतां मुच्यतामेष ब्राह्मणो नितरां गुरुः ।  
सरहस्यो धनुर्वेदः सविसर्गोपसंयमः ॥  
अस्त्रग्रामश्च भवता द्रोणः प्रजारूपेण वर्तते ॥

१४. Udyoga, 29-21

१५. यदा गृध्येत् पराभूतौ नृशंसो विधिप्रकोपात् बलमाददानः ।  
त तो राज्ञां अभवत् युध्दमेतत् तत्र जातं वर्म शस्त्रं धनुश्च ॥

इन्द्रेणैतत् दस्युवधाय कर्म उत्पादितं वर्म शस्त्रं धनुश्च ॥

(Udyoga, 29-30)

१६. स्तेनो हरेत् यत्र धनं ह्यदृष्टः  
प्रसह्य वा यत्र हरेत दृष्टः ।  
उभौ गह्वर्यो भवतः संजयैतौ  
किं वै पृथक्त्वं धृतराष्ट्रस्य पुत्रे ॥ (Udyoga, 29-33)
१७. वनं राजा धृतराष्टः सपुत्रो व्याघ्रास्ते वै संजय पाण्डुपुत्राः ।  
सिंहागिगुप्तं न वनं विनश्येत् सिंहो न नश्येत वनाभिगुप्तः ॥  
(Ibid 54)
१८. क्षत्रियः क्षत्रियं हन्ति मत्स्यो मत्स्येन जीवति ।  
श्वा श्वानं हन्ति दाशार्ई पश्य धर्मो यथागतः ॥ (Udyoga 72-48)
१९. अत्र या प्रणिपातेन शान्तिः सैव गरीयसी ॥ (Ibid. 68)
२०. उभयोरेव वामर्थे यास्यामि कुरुसंसदम् ।  
शमं तत्र लभेयं चेत् युष्मदर्थमहापयन् ॥  
पुण्यं मे सुमहत् राजन् चरितं स्यान्महाफलम् ।  
मोचयेयं मृत्युपाशात् संरब्धान् कुरुसंजयान् ॥  
पाण्डवान् धार्तराष्ट्रान् च सर्वा च पृथिवीमिमाम् ॥ (Ibid 71-81)
२१. अहं तु सर्वलोकस्य गत्वा छेत्स्यामि संशयम् ।  
येषामस्ति द्विधाभावो राजन् दुर्योधनं प्रति ॥  
मध्ये राज्ञामहं तत्र ..... (Ibid. 73-28,29)
२२. गिरेखि लघुत्वं तत् शीतत्वमिव पावके । (७५-२)
२३. तस्मादितो गच्छतु धर्मशीलः  
शुचिः कुलीनः पुरुषोऽप्रमत्तः ।  
दूतः समर्थः प्रशमाय तेषां  
राज्यार्धदानाय युधिष्ठिरस्य ॥ (Udyoga 1-24)
२४. गर्दभे मार्दवं कुर्यात् गोषु तीक्ष्णं समाचरेत् ।  
मृदु दुर्योधने वाक्यं थो ब्रूयात् पापचेतसि ॥ (Ibid. 4-5)

२५. रथ ओरोप्यातां शंखः चक्रं च गदया सह ।  
उपासंगाश्च शक्तथश्च सर्वप्रहरणानि च ॥
२६. Udyoga Parvan, Chapter 7
२७. दुर्योधनश्च दुष्टात्मा कर्णश्च सह सौबलः ।  
न च शत्रुरवज्ञेयः दुर्बलोऽपि बलीयसा ॥ (Ibid. 83-13)
२८. द्विषदन्नं न भोकव्यं द्विषन्तं नैव भोजयेत्  
(अकस्मात्) पाण्डवान् द्विषसे राजन् मम प्राणा हि पाण्डवाः ॥  
(Udyoga, 91-32)
२९. Udyoga 91-17
३०. यत्र सूक्तं दुरुक्तं वा समं स्यान्मधुसूदन ।  
न तत्र प्रलपेत् प्राज्ञः बधिरोष्विव गायकः (नः) (Ibid, 92-13)
३१. दौरात्म्यं धार्तराष्ट्रस्य क्षत्रियाणां च वैरतां ।  
सर्वमेतदहं जानन् क्षत्तः प्राप्तोऽस्मि कौरवान् ॥  
पर्यस्तां पृथिवीं सर्वा साश्वान् सरथकुञ्जरां ।  
यो मोचयेत् मृत्युपाशात् प्रान्पुयात् धर्ममुत्तम् ॥  
न मां ब्रूयुरधर्मिष्ठाः मूढाः ह्यसुहृदस्तथा ।  
'शक्तो नावारयत् कृष्णः संरब्धान् कुरुपाण्डवान् ।'  
उभयोः संधयन्नर्थं अहमागत इत्युत ॥  
पुण्यं च मे स्याच्चरितं महात्मन्  
मुच्येरंश्च कुरवो मृत्युपाशात् ।  
अपि वाचं भाषमाणस्य काव्यां  
धर्मारामां अर्थवतीं अहिंसां ॥ (Ibid Verses 17,20)

## Sri Krishna as Philosopher and Yogin

A Philosopher is one who has a well-reasoned outlook of life on the basis of irrefutable evidences and direct experience of life, and a Yogin is one who actually lives that life himself as an example. Rarely does a man become both! There are those on the one hand who can decide at the heights of human thought what is ultimate Truth, Beauty or Goodness, or Supreme Tattva, Hita, Purushartha (i.e., the Metaphysical Highest, the Moral Highest, and the Summum bonum), without being able to put all this great and wonderful wisdom into daily practice in their own lives; there are also those others who are determined enough to put any philosophy into practice, but who are confused in their own thought and therefore cannot decide for themselves what is Truth, what is Good, and for what Purushartha they have to live. It is difficult to combine wisdom with goodness and live the life of a practical sage or saint. Philosophical wisdom does rarely go with practical wisdom. It is easy to show in the history of mankind great souls that taught great wisdom but who became martyrs because they lacked the practical wisdom to make their wisdom 'get on' in life. **That requires practical action.** Socrates was one of the greatest and wisest of men of his times; but he did not know how to avoid hemlock, live longer and make his thoughts practically applicable and show it all to his contemporaries. He met with his personal tragedy as he had no political power, without that power corrupting him. He failed to get on in a society that could not understand him, because he could not make himself understood by them. He did not have a wisdom that could save him, and his society at the same time. It was an uncompromising idealism that failed to take note of the hard facts of reality.

The same was the case of Jesus Christ. Spiritual wisdom not backed by practical, political or social wisdom was the cause

of his crucifixion. It is a travesty that the same un-understanding people around him made a religion out of their misunderstanding of Christ. For the spread and growth of Christianity therefore we have to find reasons, more among the political powers that found it convenient to spread it, and possessed the will and the determination to do so, than within the teachings of Christ himself. If Socratic thought had found political votaries also, whose convenience it might have suited to spread it, and who had an organisation to do so, perhaps it would have been another world-religion today, and a challenge to Christianity. Mohammed escaped martyrdom as he wielded considerable political power and whatever wisdom he taught began to be taught at the tip of the sword in his own time, and at the point of the bayonet later on, and even now! A very strange way of 'educating' people in philosophical wisdom!

In our own days Mahatma Gandhi was undoubtedly a very great man in Soul-power, and spiritual wisdom, and he did wield unusual political power too over millions of people both at home and abroad. But he lacked in practical wisdom in showing how all his great thought could work in politics, as he was too simple a man for terrible and seasoned political strategists like Jinnah and his British mentors behind the scene. Gandhi was no diplomat, and no strategist, and his spiritual wisdom never operated at this political level. Hence his martyrdom, and his 'Himalayan Blunders.'

Aurobindo was one of the world's greatest spiritual giants of our own times, and had all the potentialities of a political revolutionary with spiritual wisdom; but he withdrew into privacy, being unwilling to spend his hard earned power of penance - rather waste it - in the political turmoil that the country was undergoing, for any tangible good, in visible terms. He believed in influencing the political turns from behind the scenes, silently and unostentatiously.

Hence it is difficult to show a parallel for Sri Krishna in combining spiritual wisdom with political wisdom to make one complex, organic, philosophical outlook of life, and to live it and make it successful, by diplomacy, strategy, and active but unselfish participation in the decisive moments of action that that history-making involved. On a smaller scale we can mention Acharya Kautilya as a spiritual giant of his times, as

an unmatched political thinker, and practical visionary of a welfare state, leading Chandragupta to success by his endless and unique political strategies and diplomatic achievements, to which Arthasastra and other historical records bear witness. But Kautilya did not put his spiritual wisdom into his political wisdom, and in fact went too far away from it in practice, and so the world of today does not remember him as a Yogin, though in life he was one, and it remembers him as a shrewd, if also a heartless, practitioner of statecraft. Few would remember his unselfish service to the country at a time when it needed it, or him, most. Chanakya (or Kautilya) has left behind him no code book of spiritual wisdom, like Sri Krishna's Bhagavad Gita, from which one can deduce parallel systems of social or political wisdom too! The world is yet to see a temple raised in honour of Kautilya, though he richly deserves it from every angle.

So all history-makers are not men of spirituality. All spiritual men are not politically wise. All philosophers are not able personal exponents or exemplars of what they teach. Where all these virtues may combine, sincerity, humanity, selflessness may be lacking.

If there is but one exception to all this in the history of mankind, that would be Sri Krishna, indeed, as we shall show in detail, hereafter.

## **1. The Spiritual wisdom of Sri Krishna**

On the basis of the Bhagavad gita (which is a monument of Sri Krishna's legacy to us of his spiritual and practical wisdom) and other numerous instances of 'Sri Bhagawan uvacha' ("What the Divine Lord Spoke") we can roughly sketch his vision of life here and hereafter as below, and study what political, social, ethical overtones it has to us as a practical source of guidance in daily life.

It would be good to remember also that this wisdom of Sri Krishna has the backing of the entire Vedic, Vedantic wisdom, passed on from immemorial times over generations of humanity, but with better clarity and crispness, and without that complicated symbolic and liturgical language of the Veda and the difficulties that are obvious in piercing into that enormity of accumulated wisdom. Indeed the Bhagavad gita is a

simplified version of that venerable oral text, the Veda, that manifest itself in that form to remove the confusions about the true teaching of the Veda, and set it in easily understandable language for the practical use of princes and lay men, when those confusions had arisen because of its misunderstandings by men of learning themselves, who had gone too far away from life in the name of transcendental wisdom, or were too near their own selfishness in the name of practical wisdom, thus allowing an undesirable gap develop between thought and action, between feeling and thought, and between action and feeling. Men of the work-a-day world felt they had no need for God, and men of God felt they had nothing to do or achieve in life, and thus it was an age of confusion in thought, crisis in morality or ethics, and with scoundrels in top positions of political power, and men of spirituality in exile or living incognito. There was a well organised, powerful political plot to bury the common decencies of life, and throw overboard the time-honoured, time-valued principles of individual and collective life, substituting for it a brutal practicalism of unconcealed and, unashamed selfishness, in consequence of which philosophies that taught escapism had come to acquire a false respectability, thus ratiocinating cowardice, the wish to die and be no more. It is at this juncture that history needed a turn in thought, in action, in example, in guidance, in a revolution in every sense. Sri Krishna fulfilled this requirement superbly as an Avatar of God, and his services have remained hence unparalleled to this day.

The gist of Sri Krishna's teaching is that life is an eternal battlefield between good and evil, in thought, feeling and action, and there is no running away from it. Man is bound by duty to discharge his debts to gods and fellow-human beings. That duty is not optional, nor exchangeable. There is a divine law that regulates birth and the distribution of duties among living things. When it applies to man it is called Varna, and it is not man-made and therefore inviolable by man. That law says that it is a warrior's duty to lay down his life, if necessary, in protecting the subjects under his care. If the warrior does not do his duty like others discharging their duties, irrespective of the fruits thereof, the law of the jungle will prevail, and that could mean the collapse of civilization. It is therefore necessary to overcome evil in society, in the form of confusion of duties. That would mean also the conquering of

evil in the form of imbalanced feelings and impure thoughts. The eschewing of evil and the killing of enemies on the battlefield is not to be mistaken itself for any evil! It is no more than the removal of bad thoughts and bad feelings in the mind of one's self, for the right functioning of the human personality. All life is a flow, and nothing can remain static or inactive in it even for a fraction of a second. The real evil is the desire to escape or be inactive! For the right frame of mind to engage in the right duty or right action, a whole discipline is needed, starting with food habits, regulation of hours of work and rest. The faith of a man, his temperament and mentality are determined in no small measure by these daily disciplines, which may vary from man to man in different vocations.

Life is a grand chain of sacrifices; all duty discharged without fear or favour could be that sacrifice. A sacrifice is an activity which sublimates life movement from a lower phase into a higher one. It involves knowledge of the self which is indestructible. Mere activity minus this self-knowledge, and without dedicating the fruits thereof to God, can be and is, a source of human bondage leading to degeneration of the mind of man in the endless cycles of Karma. Professional obligations can and must become the individual's daily mode of worship of the Divine. However terrible that profession may be, it is such worship, if discharged unselfishly. Where selfishness creeps and self knowledge disappears even respectable professions degenerate from worship to mere Karma, entailing Karmic effects.

Professional perfection achieved through an equanimity of mind, and duties discharged as veritable service unto God lead by themselves into a vision of the Self - atmavalokana. It is an experience excessively blissful, and unlike any material experience. It does not come of possessing anything nor of dispossession of material objects. It is a natural experience which must come of course to all things alive; but it is eclipsed under wrong knowledge, fear, anxiety, infatuation, craving and the myriad other vulgar states of mind prompted by selfishness. Steady practice of the Self-vision in course of time would lead to God-vision, as comprehending all else within it. It is a vision in which God can be seen in all things, living and non-living, as well as one in which that all else can also be seen in Him. Paradoxical it may be, but that is the truth. This



can be achieved through a steady-love of God, maturing through different stages of Bhakti such as Para Bhakti, Para Jnana and Parama Bhakti, (i.e. God love that craves to see Him, God-love that causes infinite and unbearable pain in the absence of that Vision or God Union, and God-love that is fulfilled supremely in such a union, seeking nothing more). The course is difficult no doubt, and long. There is also no saying how long it will take! It can never be a time-bound programme. One must practice this steady love till the moment of one's separation from body, and this last moment's loving contemplation of the Divine is a sure means of deliverance from the cycles of rebirth and Karma. But there is no guarantee that even the best among self-disciplined Yogins is not led astray by the ever wavering mind at that decisive moment. Hence all the earlier mentioned daily disciplines are unavoidable. But still the risk is there.

For those humble and helpless devotees, impatient of this lengthy, risky path, involving several lives and self-sustained efforts continuously, the alternative is the Path of Self-Surrender, also prescribed by Vedas, Agamas, Itihasas and Puranas. It is easy to follow, short in course, and sure of the desired fruit. But it is equally rigorous and involves unflinching self-determination.

The first requisite is of Absolute Faith in God's saving power, His great Grace, His Divine Nature, and auspicious qualities. The second is the absolute willingness to abide by all those rules that would put us on His side, taking us nearer Him. The third is the determination to abjure whatever detracts us from this path. The fourth one is the act of self-surrender itself in word, thought and deed. The fifth is the feeling of utter helplessness without God and his protective Grace. With such discipline called the Yoga of self-surrender, an ignorant man can become a man of great knowledge; mere action or activity sublimed into God-Service - Kainkarya; and mere knowledge matured into God-love, the wisdom beyond which there is nothing more to be known. This Yoga cuts at the very roots of the cycles of rebirth. It entails freedom from bondage and ignorance, here and now, and can release him even from his body if the desire is strong; or else, it guarantees death without pain or perpetuity back into the cycles of life and death, and liberation at the moment of death.

The man so liberated would be almost Godly, or God-like, except partaking of the unique functions of Godhead- like creation, etc. He will risk no more separation from God or bodily ills; but he can nevertheless participate in the onward march of the universe, macrocosmically, but with pure benevolence and no taint of selfishness. That is immortality - to be ever an instrument of service of God, and at his command, possessing infinite attributes like being beyond ageing, beyond hunger and thirst, beyond death, beyond sorrow, free from sin, and possessing unfailing powers of willing things in the interests of the universe and so on, that the Upanishads speak of.

This immortality that Sri Krishna speaks of is to be understood as the culmination of the process of Self-perfection, and is not to be confused with the mere isolation of the self from the body as the Sankhyans speak of, or that grand state of Emptiness, of Nothing that the Buddhists would speak. There is no trace of negative thought anywhere in Sri Krishna's teachings, no contempt for life here on the earth or beyond, no rejection of anything worthwhile in life, but only a sublimation of human tastes, aided by self-control, i.e. the control of the senses as a primary discipline.

It can be seen that in this teaching of Sri Krishna there is both Theory (Philosophy) and Practice (Yoga). It is a balanced programme for self-perfection involving human efforts compelling God's Grace to descend. It involves human freedom and rejects the tyranny of pre-determinism. It explains self-causation as well as causation due to other sources or agencies. It ensures individual excellence and social well-being as promoted by that private excellence, and leaves scope for that development. It keeps in mind human welfare (Loka sangraha), and debars none as condemned as beyond redemption. It avoids Eternal Hell, and easy salvation guaranteed in advance, punishment and favour as scattered by chance and not earned by choice. It is a very highly balanced view of life that excludes all exclusions, easy to understand and practice.

The most notable point however is that Sri Krishna taught all this - not as a recluse to a run-away from life - but as an eminent power-wielder to an equally eminent man of action holding the destiny of mankind in his hands at a crucial

moment of history on a war-field. The Bhagavad Gita, is hence a programme of practical action aimed at perfecting life here and now on this earth, and is not meant for those who cannot and do not take life seriously.

This is not a stray incident of Sri Krishna's teaching either. It is a philosophy that he consistently taught throughout his life, to whoever listened to him, and whoever needed that wisdom. It is another matter whether all those who listened acted upon it or no.

Let us see this instance of Sri Krishna's message to Dhritarashtra through Sanjaya: (Udyoga, Ch. 29 full.)

“Sanjaya, I desire the prosperity and the desire of the Pandavas fulfilled, just as I desire the welfare of Dhritarashtra and his many sons. My only and constant desire is that of lasting peace between them and I do not advise any other alternative. Dharmaraja has exhibited an unusual degree of self-control, which is why the quarrel has not yet escalated into a war still. You know, Sanjaya, that neither I have, nor Yudhishthira has deviated from the path of Righteousness. . . . some sages have taught that the attainment of Siddhi (perfection) is through Action, while others have taught that it is possible by Intuiting the Divine directly (Vidyaya). But listen to my view: it is well known to even a (learned) Brahmin that for all his learning, the satisfaction of appetite cannot take place as long as he does not eat the puddings. Those Intuitions alone are capable of achieving the desired perfection that involve and actually work through practical action, and not those others (not backed by such action.)<sup>1</sup> The example we can have for this is that only by the action of drinking of the water, the thirst of a thirsty man can be quenched and not by any non-active means. It is by action only that the gods of heaven shine; it is by action only that the wind moves everywhere. The Sun too lives by action only, by rising (and setting) tirelessly, day and night <sup>2</sup> . . . The god of death, Yama, Kubera the Vaishravana, Gandharvas, Yakshas, the Apsaras, the Rishis - all - shine there above, by the triple means of **Brahmavidya** (Divine Intuitions) **Brahmacharya** (the life of discipline, tuned to achieve God attainment), and **Kriya** (activity supporting the body as the means and instrument for that achievement)<sup>3</sup> Oh Charioteer! (Sanjaya) you know this law governing all life, inclusive of the

castes of Brahmins, Warriors (and others); but why do you speak for the Kauravas and support their cause, although you are the wisest among those who know all this?" And then Sri Krishna sketches briefly the duties of different Varnas and expounds the duty of the Warrior to maintain Law and Order with or without resorting to the use of the weapons, depending on the situation. His duty is to enforce natural individual duties on the parts of everyone else in society. The use of weapons is necessitated when one individual covets and grabs another's property. You cannot blame the warrior and his bloody duty to enforce peace, without blaming the base human instinct to steal, rob and exploit, which creates destructive imbalances in society. Shield, weapon and bow were born the moment these vulgar instincts manifest themselves in life. It was Indra who caused them to so manifest.<sup>4</sup>

One can notice in all this teaching a summary of the Karmayoga part of the teachings of the Gita - that man is born to duty invariably along with his birth, which can neither be ignored, escaped nor exchanged; that the ultimate good one can achieve is through the performance of that divine duty and not by skipping it in the names of specious excuses; that life here or beyond is impossible for those who elevate laziness into grand-looking but empty attitudes in life; that individual or collective life would merely be a mirage without healthy pre-occupations and activities that could sustain it; that the higher phases of life in terms of refined self-knowledge, or refined and unselfish devotion to God are impossible without this basic vocational integrity and loyalty.

For another instance let us turn to this: this time Sri Krishna is directly instructing Yudhishtira, to quell his mental blank and darkness:

"Oh king! your justice-based policy cannot be matched with their hate-based policy!<sup>5</sup> There is no renunciation allowed for a Warrior; in fact it is ruled out by all lawgivers; a Warrior should not live on alms and beg. He should either win or die on a battlefield, and that is his specific duty, and not living at the mercy of others.<sup>6</sup> This is a God-ordained law".

Please see complete identity between this and the Gita view.

Consider also this teaching of Sri Krishna to the sorrowing Yudhishtira, after his coronation:

"Disease is of two sources and kinds: pertaining to the body; and pertaining to the mind. A state of total painlessness, while in them, does not obtain as they are mutually dependent. Sensations like cold and heat arising in the body due to movements of breaths in it, and their imbalances are bodily ills. A balance between them when possible is what is known as bodily health. So also qualities like Sattva, rajas and tamas are qualities that affect the mind also. A sense of joy can suppress sorrow, or vice versa. But you (as Soul) being truly beyond these passing feelings, are in reality neither the sorrower of sorrows, nor the enjoyer of joys, and yet your nature is such that past sorrows drag you into their net of unhappiness. If you wish to overcome sequences of such sorrow, you have to fight with this internal sorrow within your own mind, with your own mind as the weapon. That battle is unmanifest to the eye, and hence you must use a greater skill and activity as technique. It is a battle which you must fight alone, unaided. There is no room for the use of arrows, nor the employment of servants or relatives in that battle; because you alone can see your enemy to fight him in you! Such a battle, surely, awaits you now. Without winning that battle what will happen to you? (How will you endure living in the body?) Know this and achieve what deserves to be achieved. Decide on the right frame of mind (for this internal battle), and meditate on how beings arise and disappear, and then rule your empire as best you can in the path of your ancestors."<sup>7</sup>

We cannot find a better and simpler sum up of the Gita than this elsewhere, in the words of Sri Krishna himself: - that true happiness consists in a balance of bodily and mental qualities, and all external war is a physical manifestation of this internal war; that is a war where one is unaided, and must fight alone, and fight, one must. This involves a right frame of mind, and the choice of right activities, as no other skill is of any use. This is the predicament of all living things, having bodies and minds, and there is no use regretting having been born into a body! For none is permanent while in it, too!! The best is the course of discharge of the right duties, as resorted to by the ancient Emperors, the ancestors of Yudhishtira, and stop worrying about the unavoidable. Please also note the emphasis on action as duty aided by self-conquest.

It is well known that a good part of the teaching of the Gita concerns the conquest of the mind and the senses. It is not the mere giving up of things under one's possession that leads to true dispossession, Sri Krishna teaches, in the Gita; it is rather the very sense of possession that requires to be given up, for the achievement of the state of non-bondage. One who gives up things externally, but possesses them internally by the seeds of attachment ever-growing in him is condemned by Sri Krishna as a *mithyachari*, a hypocrite!

See this parallel teaching by him in the *Asvamedhika Parvan*:

"True attainment of perfection is not possible by a mere giving up of things externally; the two syllabled word 'mama' - 'mine', in meaning, is a whole world of Death! But that other three syllabled word "na-mama" - 'not mine' in meaning, is the veritable enduring world of God!!" Even after obtaining all this entire world and the moving and non-moving things in it, he who does not feel that it belongs to him, has no selfish use for it; for what more is there for him to attain? So also if after renouncing everything, a man lives in a forest as a recluse but with the sense of, and longing for possession of things so left behind him, verily does he live in the very mouth of Death!"<sup>9</sup>

The *Anugita* is a grand but a more terse restatement of the philosophy of Sri Krishna, occurring in the same *Asvamedhika Parvan* (Ch. 16 onwards), for the benefit of Arjuna, who confesses that he has forgotten most of that original teaching. Sri Krishna employs here the most intricate liturgical symbolism of the Yajurveda to describe life as a Grand Sacrifice, from the angles of the Ten Sacrificers, Nine Sacrificers, etc. (*Dasha Hotri Yajna* etc.) One who does not know the Vedic symbolism can hardly make anything out of it. For those who are conversant with the Vedic symbolism, here are some of the highest flights of that grand intuition. They cannot be dealt with casually in an introductory manner, without elaborate explanations, or proper initiation into the world of Vedic mysteries. Indeed, it is ironical that Sri Krishna should have resorted to this more difficult method of teaching one who could not properly follow or remember the earlier, easier statement of that same philosophy as found in the Gita. This is more intricate and more complex; the method is

indirect also as it involves 'narration' of wisdom by past teachers to past pupils in similar, crucial contexts. The entire gamut of Gita's basic ideas in terms of gunatraya, kshetrajnya, antaryami, Jnanayoga, Karmayoga, Bhakti yoga, Prapatii, all cosmos as God's Personality, sustained by Him and in Him, purusharthas, moksha etc. has been restated here in the form of upakhyanas and itihasas involving earlier famous teachers and their considered opinions, concepts like Time, human personality, self-control, desire-conquest, the Varnas, Ashramas, social order and well-being, Jivatma and Paramathma and their distinction, Supreme Dharma, Tapas, etc. come in for a more elaborate treatment in greater depth. But it is a pity that this Anugita, running into about thirty six chapters in a full upa-parvan of this Asvamedha parvan has not received considerable attention even by traditional Indian Scholars, to this day! - possibly because none of the major Bhasyakaras on Prasthanatraya has chosen to comment on it. The anugita will be of great help to cross-check the major ideas of the Gita, as interpreted severally by the differing Bhashyakaras, to ascertain the fairness or nearness of their divergent interpretations, or otherwise. (It is good that we have an English translation of it in the 'Sacred Books of the East' series, but even this has not received the publicity it should have, because of the importance of the original).

There is an interesting episode soon after the conclusion of the Anu Gita. Sri Krishna sets out to Dwaraka, after crowning Yudhishtira, and ensuring that he does not renounce his royal duties in preference to those of an objectionable recluse as per his earlier wish. On his way Sri Krishna meets a sage by name Uttanka, who did not yet know of the Mahabharatha War. The sage presumes that Sri Krishna had actually used his good offices to avoid the fratricidal war, and had brought about a true rapprochement by his wise mediation. When he learns to the contrary effect that the war was actually fought, and that the Kauravas and a sizable population of the world along with them were wiped out, he wants to curse Sri Krishna, for not having so prevented that war, although he was actually capable of it, as he supposes. Sri Krishna, then, tells him:

"Look here, sage, and listen to the Supreme spiritual wisdom (tad adhyatmam) and decide as you please. You

cannot curse me with your limited power of penance; and I do not wish you to lose your hard-earned power of penance, either."<sup>10</sup>

And then Sri Krishna tells him what looks like a summary of the essence of Chapter 11 of the Gita, called the **Visvarupa adhyaya**:

"O sage ! know thou that the three gunas called sattva, rajas, and Tamas are ultimately grounded in me; so also the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, function with their powers invested in them by me. All beings live in me with me as their supreme support, and I live in them all as their innermost Indweller. The Titans, the Demons, Yakshas, Rakshasas and others have their abilities drawn from me. The unmanifest and manifest, the here and the yon, the ordered and the yet-unordered have all me as their Innersoul. The Division of life into the four-fold order and the four-fold Ashramas, and all other laws of life as seen and preserved in the Vedas have me as their final ground and authority. There is nothing higher than Me, the God of gods and the most Ancient in all this wide cosmos. The Holy Syllable OM, and all the Vedas are My form and spirit only."

"I am all the paraphernalia of the holy sacrifices - like the sacrificial post (Yupa), the offering (Charu), the Divine Drink called Soma, the various priests like hotri who conduct them."<sup>11</sup>

Further, Sri Krishna elaborates on the idea of Divine Descent (Avatar), which is briefly stated in Chapter 4 of the Gita. There it is simply stated that He comes down on the earth whenever there is an evil clouding of the lustre of Righteousness, to protect the good and destroy the evildoers, and thereby to uphold the Dharma; that He would resort to His own Divine urge and nature, unlike depending on the triple-qualified Matter, and that He would so come down in Yuga after Yuga in all the varied cycles of time. (The verses **paritranaya . . . .** are obvious.) But here as an additional elaboration as under:

"As cycles of time roll on, I shall bridge all the breaches of the eternal Law called Dharma, by Descending Myself in the varied forms of several living beings, in the interests of the Creatures. When, for instance, I manifest in the form of a god (**deva yonou**) or godly birth, I behave just like a god, in all my



activities. If I descend in a Gandharva form, I behave completely in conformity to that form. So also in the Naga form, or that of a Yaksha or Rakshas, or anyother. Now in this human form, all that I could do was beg of them (the evil Kauravas), as if I was helpless, (to see the Right path and behave accordingly.) But with minds eclipsed by ignorance they did not receive my words with due care and respect. I even tormented them by the prospects of terrible future, by holding it before them, in case they failed to listen to me. Overpowered by their own evil deeds and their consequences, they exterminated themselves, as by the law of time. Their elimination was but according to the law of nature", etc.<sup>12</sup>

Thus all the basic ideas of Sri Krishna's teachings as philosopher par excellence, are consistent and uniform throughout the Mahabharatha, for any one who takes the trouble to read the Holy Epic diligently. Speical note must be taken of the fact that it is the same old Vedic Vedantic thought restated here in a non-complex style, in a lucid and compact manner, avoiding liturgical, sacrificial and mythological symbolism, by the Supreme Godhead Himself. Since the Avatar is in a human form, in this context, there is the need to abide by human norms of conduct, including persuasion by instruction, by enlightenment, by revealment of laws of life and truths mystically locked at the core of the inner life of the higher beings. Hence this is an avatar in which philosophical teaching is also part of the Divine sport, Leela, unlike in any other avatar, including that of Sri Rama which is dominated over by the motive of right-action rather than right-teaching.

## 2 Sri Krishna as Yogin.

Sri Krishna is described throughout the Holy Epic not only as Yogishvara but also Yogeshvara. The first of these descriptions would mean that he lived as the Lord among Yogins, while the second would mean that he was the Lord of Yogas. Yoga is confusedly being described as all sorts of things positive and negative in this Yogi - ridden age of ours, and when Westerners in particular are so crazy of this word as to buy any stuff in that name. While reading the Mahabharatha and the Bhagavad-gita, one must keep carefully away from the later meanings that this word has acquired in the nirishvara

**Sankhya-Yoga** context of patanjali, and that of Buddhism in its varied garbs, including that of the Vedantic type that merely talks of emptying the mind, without a positive content for this experience: The word **Yoga** is as ancient as the Vedas, and genuinely it simply means the association of the mind or soul of man with the most exalted attitudes of life tuned to living in God, for God, and the achievement of a grand union with Him. The mere achievement of bodily or mental health, the mere achievement of bodily ability to sit for long hours in various postures without suffering any pain or inconvenience, or the mere emptying of the mind from un-Godly thoughts and other impediments on the way to such a Union with the Divine that is always within us, and available for such union, readily, cannot be called **Yoga** in the full sense of that term. It is also a living and loving contemplation of the Divine Indweller, that the Upanishadic Yogins intuited in some thirty two well known Vidyas, and which experience they variously described as Vedana, upasana, nididhyasana, vijnana, darshana and so on. It is the art or science of two or more individual entities surrendering their sense of separateness to produce a grand harmony of Unitive Experience, the art of maniness sublimating itself into an experience of Oneness; it is an experience where the cacophony of the manifold contradictory world is laid to rest and a new harmony of profound Meaningfulness arises on its own before which all other known experiences pale into insignificance, partiality, incompleteness, ignorance and even perversion. You do not know 'where' this experience is, untill you are 'there' yourself, leading you into light out of darkness, into Immortality out of death, into order out of chaos. That is Vedic Yoga.

Any small achievement even, in this direction has also come to be described as **Yoga**, in a limited or progressive sense, if the direction is sure or definite, and the step is firm and unwavering. The mere sattvik sadness of Arjuna in the first Chapter of the Gita has come to be characterised as **Vishada Yoga** in this sense that it was such sorrow that finally achieved for him that Divine wisdom. Indeed, each Chapter of the Gita is known as **Yoga**, and the whole text as **Yoga Sastra**, elevating in practice all things in life into **Yoga**, if they are in touch with that Divine whose union is the object of the human craving. True **Yoga** is thus integral, leaving nothing out of its orbit,

and compelling all life of the individual to be in tune with it. Conversely Yoga is no mere idle activity condemned into hypocritical practice for just a few minutes or hours of isolated life. It is a grand Integration and no Isolation. Yogas that prescribe this negative sense of Isolation are unvedic in origin, and even etymologically they are identifiable as no - Yoga! Yoga comes from the root 'yuj' which means, 'associate, unite, combine, harmonise', as any Sanskrit Dictionary can testify. Sankhya, Patanjala Yoga, and Buddhism have by today completely reversed this original sense, and against this deluge of misinterpretation, voices of sanity and wisdom have hardly a chance of fair listening. It is something like the Aurobindonian sense of Intergral Yoga, that Vedic Yoga means, the art of achieving perfection of the human personality, the goal being positive, progressive, optimistic and healthy in every desirable sense of these terms.

Sri Krishna was a disciple of Ghora Angiras, according to the Chandogya Upanishad, and he had mastered the Vedic Vidyas like the Purusha Vidya, thereby conquering hunger, thirst and such other aspects of human imperfection common to all men and women.

The Yoga he taught to Arjuna was what he had himself practised, and earlier learnt from authentic teachers, by traditional techniques. It involved the complete mastering of the senses inclusive of the mind; it meant the steady development of the will-power, to be yoked to the grandest of human purposes or purusharthas; negatively it meant a total attitude of dispossession of all material possessions, comforts, passing phases of mundane happiness or sorrow which toss up the fools in life into untold depths of depression and meaningless attitudes of empty exaltations. It meant the careful and complete cultivation of all God-given faculties within the human personality, so as to develop them into their essential fulness, and make them belong where they really do, and must, so that man as a whole is tuned to the Divine, with the body as a grand vehicle, and take off to immortality beyond its perishing.

Sri Krishna actually lived such a life. Right from his early days, as the Bhagavatham and Harivamsa describe, one can see him plunge into activities of public welfare, at great risk of

his own life, and at the cost of personal comforts. He was a vanquisher of evil forces, par excellence right from the start - a born fighter against injustice, imbalances in life, superstitions, evil practices and meaningless traditions and customs creeping into social life and acquiring false respectability. That is the first step of a teacher of Yoga. He was a revolutionary in this fullest sense, trying to restore the current of life to its true path. This is a trait common to all born Yogins from Christ to Gandhi, as the world knows. Sri Krishna opposed the evil rule of Kamsa and his cohorts, and uprooted his tribe; he taught that a better form of worship was of things that sustained life, and nourished life-saving professions like agriculture, cattle-rearing - (the Govardhana episode). He was against the oppression of women-folk, and taught that all were eligible for salvation, irrespective of sex and other inequalities falsely created by man himself. (we have an evidence of this in the episode of the wives of the Brahmins offering sacrifice, playing hospitality to the cowherds while the Brahmins themselves would play none such. The episode of the release of the princesses imprisoned by Naraka, after eliminating him, and accepting them as his honoured wives, against all social taboos and inhibitions of society, is another proof.) His respect to all womenfolk of Nanda Gokula as so many Mothers of his, till the end, is celebrated. The elimination of Jarasandha, and the liberation of the eighty six crowned princes sadly awaiting the day of their human sacrifice, to please Lord Shiva, is another act of relief to the oppressed. His relation with the Pandavas, particularly with the humiliated Draupadi, and the comfort he gave them, the solace he brought them, their elevation into the highest responsibilities, including rulership, by weeding over all their obstacles in the grandest of strategies that the world has never before heard nor never again will, are all - each of them - a Yoga in the direction of Loka samgraha, to quote his own pet phraseology.

Emperorship was so near him, when Kamsa was overthrown, and when the Yadava Kinsmen offered it to him. But like a true Yogin - even of the tribe of our latest examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo - he wanted none of this political glorification. Work was worship enough for him, the true Karma-Yogi that he was; the reward for that work was, doing it well enough for his own inner satisfaction, so that value-

realised, was value - achieved, then and there. One cannot imagine a more politically powerful man in the whole age, who could make kings or unmake them by spiritual power translated into appropriate political or social action, in measured steps of calculated strategies. Had he wanted, he might have had an unquestioned monarchy of the whole world, backed by the opinion of the wisest and mightiest among the men of his times. But he was never attracted by such fading glory. He had the famous eight wives (Ashta mahishi), each one of them wedded to him at her request, or in circumstances their parents offered them to him, keeping this welfare in mind; even so he was never tempted by any sex-impulse or tricked by their amorous devices as Srimad Bhagavatham describes.<sup>13</sup> The children he granted his child-coveting wives were products of his supreme Yogic powers, and not of any sex act, as great commentators explain; and that he was a particular husband to every particular wife was also a Yogic - miracle like what Sowbhari the Puranic Yogi illustrated, being married to several wives at the same time, and satisfying each of them, illustrating the metaphysical paradox of "particular providence for particular occasion" as modern Western philosophers would put it. It signifies symbolically that the Indweller is but one, though his physical habitations are numerous, and acting differently with each, at any given moment. At the time of the famous Rasalila in the Bhagavatham Sri Krishna was just about seven years old, as any diligent reader of the Epic can make out, and that is even by human reckoning not the age for demoralised amorous sports. It is a fertile field of anti-Krishna propaganda by the ignorant haters of Hindu culture and tradition, but scrupulous students of culture cannot be fooled ! Yoga grants many achievements called siddhis, and Sri Krishna was a rare Siddhapursha of almost unbelievable miraculous powers. One fine example we can note is what both the Mahabharatha and the Bhagavatham have unequivocally recorded: the bringing back into life, of the burnt Parikshit, son of Abhimanyu and Uttara, after Asvatthama delivers the a-pandavastra, a weapon calculatedly used to wipe out all Pandava - progeny. The anxious and pregnant Uttara cries for help, to Sri Krishna, describing him as a great Yogin.<sup>14</sup>

To this, Sri Krishna responds quickly by a grand show of yogic powers vindicating his Brahmacharya by putting into test,

as it were, by the following vow celebrated in a verse of the Mahabharatha which most of the modern-day editions do not contain, but which ancient Acharyas quote as authentic: "If I have performed and stuck to Brahmacharya, if Truth lives in me grounded in all my actions, if my overlordship of all the worlds is uncontradicted by anyone, then, let this young child come back to life."<sup>15</sup> In the available editions we have this: "I shall bring back to life this baby burnt by the fire power of the weapon; you, brute! (Asvathama!) see the power or vitality of my Tapas, and my life of Truthfulness."<sup>16</sup>

The display of Visvarupa (cosmic vision) in the Eleventh Chapter of the Gita, a similar one in the royal court of Dhritarashtra, (during the peace-mission episode), the sudden causing of the effect of a sunset well before the sunset actually happened, during the episode of the slaying of Saindhava (Jayadratha) in the Drona Parvan, the causing of the sinking of Arjun's Chariot to avoid the aiming at his throat by Karna, in the Karna Parvan, the causing of that Chariot to be reduced to ashes, after the great War, and a score of other episodes display rare Yogic powers on the part of Sri Krishna which unbelievers have always tended to disbelieve. But we have an authentic Epic with us, and we have either to take it all as of one piece or reject it so. Having taken it up, we have no standards to discriminate between what we can believe or disbelieve.

Sri Krishna hardly appears as a common man rising to heights of Yogic achievements in such instances, and unless one is also prepared to see him also as Yogeswara - the Lord of supernatural powers, one cannot easily understand or appreciate this aspect of his Divine Personality.

And that takes us on to Sri Krishna as God, as an Avatar, unique, and incomparable on human terms, which will be our special topic in the last lecture of this series. In the last verse of the Gita, and soon after obtaining the Visvarupa Vision (Ch.11), Sanjaya describes Sri Krishna as Yogeswara, and maha yogeswara, as the Lord who grants particular fruits of particular acts of omission and commission of every Individual Soul in accordance with the law of Karma, as belonging to them by right; a dispenser of justice, and God who grants what must belong to every Individual Soul. But without touching on

this, at least tangentially, one cannot completely grasp the personality of Sri Krishna as Yogin. What has been so far described is purely from the human angle within our obvious limits. Any complete understanding of human Yogins from a purely human angle is wellnigh an impossibility, for there is nothing unpermeated by the Divine; and water-tight-compartments of things into rigidly physical, biological, and supernatural elements is entirely arbitrary, and unwarranted by the facts of our daily experience.

There is however a great lesson in the Yogi aspect of Sri Krishnavatar; it is to tempt the ordinary human individual to Divine Heights and to show that it is possible, - this rising above the din and bustle of daily noisy life, and to taste the higher joys of a really spiritual life, and its grand harmonies. The key to it is - as is taught in the Sixth Chapter of the Gita - a balanced life of the Golden Mean, avoiding extremes, in terms of food, work, play, sleep and rest; avoiding rigours, but keeping steady and steadfast. This applies to all aspects of life as Yoga, including politics, social reform, family-life, friendly relations, war - if it is unavoidable - economy and public administration, and every other required and justified aspect of life. Nothing is really outside the scope of, or purview of Yoga, considered properly, and that is the speciality of Sri Krishna's personality and practice as Yogin and philosopher. In the whole range of the world's known philosophers and Yogins, we are yet to see one of the order, of the magnitude, of the quality of Sri Krishna, and the description merits a whole book, not a mere lecture or article.

## Chapter 3

१. कर्मणाहुः सिद्धिमेके परत्र  
हित्वा कर्म विद्यया सिद्धिमेके ।  
नाभुञ्जानो भक्ष्यभोज्यस्य तृप्येत्  
विद्वानपीह विहितं ब्राह्मणानाम् ॥ (श्लो ६)  
या वै विद्याः साधयन्तीह कर्म  
तासां फलं विद्यते नेतरासाम् ।  
तत्रेह वै दृष्टफलं तु कर्म  
पीत्वोदकं शाम्यति तृष्णयार्तः ॥ (७)
२. कर्मणामी भान्ति देवाः परत्र  
कर्मणैवेह प्लवते मातरिश्वा ।  
अहोरात्रे विदधत् कर्मणैव  
अतन्द्रितो नित्यमुदेति सूर्यः ॥ (९)
३. यमो राजा वैश्रवणो कुबेरो  
गन्धर्वयक्षाप्सरसश्च सूत ।  
ब्रह्मविद्यां ब्रह्मचर्यं क्रियां च  
निषेवमाणा ऋषयोऽमुत्र भान्ति ॥ (श्लो १६)
४. यदा गृध्येत् परभूतौ नृशंसो  
विधिप्रकोपात् बलमाददानः ।  
ततो राज्ञामभवत् युध्दमेतत्  
तत्र जातं वर्म शस्त्रं धनुश्च ॥  
इन्द्रेणैतत् दस्युवधाय कर्म  
उत्पादितं वर्म शस्त्रं धनुश्च ॥ (श्लो ३०)
५. तव धर्माश्रिता बुद्धिः तेषां वैराश्रया मतिः । (Udyoga 73-2)
६. न चैव नैष्ठिकं कर्म क्षत्रियस्य विशांपते ।  
आहुराश्रमिणः सर्वे न भैक्षं क्षत्रियश्चरेत् ॥  
जयो वधो वा संग्रामे धात्रादिष्टः सनातनः ।  
स्वधर्मेः क्षत्रियस्यैष कार्पण्यं न प्रशस्यते ॥ (Ibid)



७. द्विविधो जायते व्याधिः शारीरो मानसस्तथा ।  
 परस्परं तयोर्जन्म निर्द्वन्द्वं नोपपद्यते ॥  
 शरीरे जायते व्याधिः शारीरः स निगद्यते ।  
 मानसे जायते व्याधिः मानसस्तु निगद्यते ॥  
 शीतोष्णौ चैव वायुश्च गुणा राजन् शरीरजाः ।  
 तेषां गुणानां साम्यं चेत् तदाहुः स्वस्थलक्षणम् ॥  
 हषेण बाध्यते शोको हर्षः शोकेन बाध्यते ।  
 स त्वं न दुःखी दुःखस्य न सुखी सुसुखस्य च ।  
 स्मर्तुमिच्छसि कौन्तेय किमन्यत् दुःखविभ्रमात् ॥ .....  
 मनसैकेन योद्धव्यं तत् ते युद्धमुपस्थितम् ।  
 परमव्यक्तरूपस्य पारं युक्त्या स्वकर्मभिः ॥  
 यत्र नैव शरैः कार्यं न भृत्यैः न च बन्धुभिः ।  
 आत्मनैकेन योद्धव्यं तत् ते युद्धमुपस्थितम् ॥  
 तस्मिन्ननिर्जिते युद्धे कामवस्थां गमिष्यसि ।  
 एतंज्ज्ञात्वा तु कौन्तेय कृतकृत्यो भविष्यासि ॥  
 एतां बुद्धिं विनिश्चित्य भूतानामागतिं गतिं ।  
 पितृपैतामहे वृत्ते शाधि राज्यं यथोचितम् ॥

(Asvamedhika1-16)

८. न बाह्यं द्रव्यमुत्सृज्य सिद्धिर्भवति भारत ।.....  
 द्वयक्षरस्तु भवेन्मृत्युः त्र्यक्षरं ब्रह्म शाश्वतम् ॥ (13-1,3)

९. लब्ध्वा हि पृथिवीं सर्वा सह स्थावरजङ्गमां ।  
 ममत्वं यस्य नैव स्यात् किं तया स करिष्यति ? ॥  
 अथवा वसतः पार्थ वने वन्येन जीवतः ।  
 ममता यस्य द्रव्येषु मृत्योरास्ये स वर्तते ॥ (Ibid. 6,7)

९. Asvamedha : 53 - 23 to 26

१०. Ibid 54-1 to 10

१२. धर्मस्य सेतुं बध्नामि चलिते चलिते युगे ।  
 तास्ताः योनीः प्रविश्याहं प्रजानां हितकाम्यया ॥  
 यदा त्वहं देवयोनौ वर्तामि भृगुनन्दन ।

तदाहं देववत् सर्वं आचरामि न संशयः ॥  
 यदा गन्धर्वयोनी वा वर्तामि भृगुनन्दन ।  
 तदा गन्धर्ववत् सर्वं आचरामि न संशयः ॥  
 नागयोनी यदा चैव तदा वर्तामि नागवत् ।  
 यक्षराक्षसयोन्योस्तु यथावत् विचराम्यहम् ॥  
 मानुष्ये वर्तमाने तु कृपणं याचिता मया ।  
 न च ते जातसम्मोहा वचोऽगृह्णन्त मे हितम् ॥  
 भयं च महदुद्दिश्य त्रासिताः कुरवो मया ।  
 तेऽधर्मेणेह संयुक्ताः परीताः कालधर्मणा ।  
 धर्मेण निहता युध्दे .....॥ ((Asva, 54-16 to 24)

१३. XI- 6-18 and I - II-36, 39, as under :

स्मायावलोकलवदर्शित भावहारि-  
 भ्रूमण्डलप्रहितसौरतमन्त्रशौण्डैः ।  
 पल्यस्तु षोडशसहस्रमनंग बाणैः  
 यस्येन्द्रियं विमथितुं करणैर्न विभ्व्यः ॥  
 उद्दाम भावपिशुनामल वल्गुहास-  
 व्रीडावलोकनिहतो मदनोऽपि यासां ।  
 संमुह्य चापमजहात् प्रमदोत्तमास्ताः  
 यस्यैन्द्रियं विमथितुं कुहकैर्न शेकुः ॥  
 तं मेनिरेऽबला मूढाः स्त्रैणं चानुव्रतं रहः ।  
 अप्रमाणविदो भर्तुः ईश्वरं मतयो यथा ॥

१४. पाहि पाहि महायोगिन् देवदेव जगत्पते ।  
 नान्यं त्वदभयं पश्ये यत्र मृत्युः परस्परं ॥  
 अभिद्रवति मामीश शरस्तप्तायसो विभो ।  
 कामं दहतु मां नाथ मा मे गर्भो निपात्यतां ॥  
 (श्रीभागवतम् १-८, ९-१०)

१५. यदि मे ब्रह्मचर्यं स्यात् मयि सत्यं च तिष्ठति ।  
 अव्याहतं ममैश्वर्यं तेन जीवतु बालकः ॥

१६. अहं तं जीवयिष्यामि दग्धं शस्त्राग्नितेजसा ।  
 पश्य मे तपसो वीर्यं सत्यस्य च नराधम ॥ (Sauptika, 16-16)

### Sri Krishna's role in the War

We have already seen how Sri Krishna was perhaps the ablest politician, statesman and strategist of his days, interested in natural and lasting peace for all mankind, and how he tried sincerely his very best to avoid the war that seemed inevitable between the cousin-families. He was wedded to the goal of Dharma, human welfare, and the infinite human values without which that welfare was impossible or worthless. He himself had no selfish or ulterior motives and nobody could accuse him of any personal political ambition. He was faultless in his dealings of other men and women. He was a warrior himself and had fought with some of the mightiest foes of Dharma, himself in his youth and had brought comfort and solace to millions that required it. The world of his days shouted with joy wherever he journeyed: "Dharma is on the side of Sri Krishna; and therefore victory is always on his side." (Yato Krishnah tato Dharmah, Yato Dharmah tato jayah").

And yet the most dreaded world-war took place. How do we explain this? Ignorant and superficial admirers of Sri Krishna, without the detailed study of the Epic, commonly accuse Sri Krishna himself as having tricked the warring factions into it, by his endless and inscrutable machinations. This is unjust, unconvincing and really an insult to Sri Krishna. For, this way of accounting the war would grant no motive at all for Sri Krishna's conduct or character, besides picturing him as cruel, undependable and merely sadistic in nature, which is totally untenable against all that we have observed so far.

What, then, is the more convincing reason, why the war took place?

#### Why did the War take place?

There is a remarkable sad comment by Veda Vyasa at the end of the Epic, which gives a clue to our question by surveying all this ghastly episode of war:

"Here am I, with uplifted arms, shouting and crying at the highest pitch of my voice, that Dharma alone can bring economic prosperity, and satisfaction of pleasures. But nobody listens to me; why do not people have recourse to such Dharma."

Could there be a greater teacher than Veda Vyasa in that age? He appeared on the scene several times to advise Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and others that they must respect the cosmic law of Dharma, abide by it, and mean well by their cousins as well as themselves. But they did not heed that advice. Dhritarashtra could have lived a long life of peace and prosperity with all his hundred sons, daughters-in-law, grand sons and numerous other relations, dependents, well-wishers and servants. It was in his hands to have avoided war. So was it in the hands of Duryodhana. He did not listen to this advice either. Bhishma and Drona could have more effectively advised the bad rulers of the day, than they did, by threatening to keep away from the war, in the event of its happening. But they allowed themselves to be taken for granted and actually participated on the wrong side of war! What effective advice could they have given, with such inclinations? When Vyasa says "none listens to me - na cha kaschit-" he means these rulers and their supporters who held the destiny of mankind in their hands, in those days. For, they were the real people that mattered. There were people who taught the same advice as Vyasa, but they never mattered - people like Vidura, Vikarna, Gandhari, Maithreya, Sri Krishna, and a host of helpless Rishis and Munis. They had all become "irrelevnat" in the political situation of the day.

So, the War took place in spite of Sri Krishna, and not because of him. The sequence of events in the Udyoga Parvan would prove it beyond doubt. It was Sri Krishan's clear philosophical view that everyone must live by Dharma, on Dharma and for Dharma; and that in cases of danger for such Dharma which alone can prevent chaos or social stampede, it was the noble and bounden duty of a warrior to fight for this Dharma, and die for it if necessary, to re-establish it, in the larger interests of posterity. There were thus only two alternatives for Pandavas who entirely depended on Sri Krishna and totally acted under his advice - (i) to live as the right loyal heirs of the Bharathas, as Emperors, or (2) to fight with and eliminate the

evil minded and crooked Kauravas, to re-establish the rule of the right, if they did not return the stolen property, the stolen glory of the empire of the Pandavas. There being no third option open for a moral minded hero of those days, and the doors of the first path being firmly closed by the Kauravas, the second alternative was inevitable, after all the tremendous efforts by Sri Krishna to avoid the ghastly war.

All the evil-minded ambitious political forces had gathered on the side of Duryodhana, who was trying to gather a huge army on his side from the very day that the Pandavas were driven into exile into the forest. Some of those princes who had earlier been vanquished by the brothers of Yudhishtira, before the performance of Rajasuya by the noble prince, now joined his enemies, in the hope of regaining their chieftaincy with loyalty to none, under the future weaker rule of Duryodhana, and under the fear of having to obey Yudhishtira otherwise perpetually, in the event of his winning the war, and of the righteous rule having a chance of longer lease. This explains how the criminal minded Duryodhana could gather twelve Divisions (akshowhini) of army. The psychology is the same as in modern instances of party-splits, with the majority of opportunistic power-brokers siding with that group that can allow maximum concessions in terms of power, positions, money, perquisites, and political brokerage. The steadfast ones, the loyal ones, the really discriminating ones are always few! This was how the Pandavas could gather only seven Divisions of army. The wonder was that they gathered even this much of army, as Duryodhana is openly worried, after being out of power for long, and with all the buying power of Duryodhana rendered immune in this case. The hard core of Pandava - supporters constituted the Panchalas, as related to them by blood by Draupadi's marriage, and the Matsyas for a similar reason. Even the uncle of the Pandavas, with a huge army, deserted the Pandava camp, at the time of forming alignments, under an unconvincing excuse! The very common teacher of the warring cousins, Drona, took side with Kauravas! (This was not the expectation of the other camp.) So was the unbecoming behaviour of Bhishma, who was the common ancestor of both lines. With Drona throwing his lots with the Kauravas, his son Asvatthama, of considerable might and power of reckoning, also threw himself into that self-same

camp. Karna, the ambitious and loosely shunted force had been very early bought by Duryodhana, by the gifting of Anga Rajya to him. Duryodhana had opted for Sri Krishna's army under Kritavarma, in preference to a weaponless Sri Krishna himself, when he and Arjuna together went to seek his help, after all missions of peace had failed.

So the political alignment - rather polarity - was clear and well-demarcated, and one interested in Dharma could draw his inference as to where the princes and political centres belonged really!

What was Sri Krishna's duty, in this situation, in the light of his well-defined philosophy?

He had to be on the side of Dharma, and he was as good as his word. Indeed he had always made it clear earlier on many occasions that he was not a mute or indifferent witness to the events to allow them to drift, but was very much on the side of the wronged party. See these instances: (this is to Arjuna.)

"You belong to me and I to you; all those who belong to me, belong to you too; he who hates you, hates me too in reality and he who follows you, follows me too in my view. Oh Arjuna you are Nara, the invincible, and I am Narayana, Sri Hari. We have come down on this earth in time, being twin Rishis of Yore, (in the world's interest.) You are inseparable from me, and so am I too from you. It is impossible to gather differences between us, (for there are none.)"<sup>2</sup>

This next is to Duryodhana, after rejecting his hospitality and partaking of a similar one at the residence of Vidura, and in answer to Duryodhana's question about the propriety of Sri Krishna's so doing. Duryodhana pretends that there is no real hatred between them, and that he is but trying to please Sri Krishna, in the best manner he is capable of, and the best way that befits this royal ambassador; so Duryodhana does not understand why he is so humiliated by Sri Krishna, and for what offence.

See this elaborate answer of Sri Krishna:

"Friend! I shall not abjure Dharma under any circumstances - neither as a victim of vulgar desires, nor of confusions in my

duties or responsibilities; neither by hatred nor for petty economic benefits; neither tricked by false arguments nor under any temptations. Food offered is of two circumstances: one under voluntary pleasure and the other under exceptionally troublesome conditions. You are not offering me food this time under any voluntary pleasure to you; nor am I in any troubled circumstance to accept it at your hands. You hate the Pandavas for no reason whatever; and this has been your style and vocation from your very birth! Your cousins are born with splendid loveable qualities, and speak affectionately to you and want affection and friendship from you, in all their movements with you. Your hatred for them with no cause, is unreasonable and highly unjustified. The Pandavas stand steadfast in Dharma, and who can point a finger at them, or find any fault with them? He who hates them, hates me only in truth, and he who loves them or follows them, loves me and follows me too! Know me of being one with them in soul, mind and deed, as they abide by Dharma in all their activities and movements in life; here you are trying to oppose them under delusions and misled by your ambition and hatred. Such hatred of the virtuous can only belong to a mean and vulgar person. One misled by passions and greed who does not see his cousins in their true nature as possessed of excellent and amiable qualities will not live steadfast in his wealth for long, being uncontrolled in his senses, unable to eschew hatred ... The adage says that one should neither feed a hater nor partake of his food. (You may not hate me directly, but) Pandavas are like my breath, and you hate them. That is why my mind dictates me to partake of Vidura's food only (and not even of Bhishma or Drona, as they are fed on your food!)”<sup>3</sup>

For a third instance we can turn to Bhishma Parvan. The context is that of Yudhishtira's meeting of Bhishma on the night of the ninth day of the war. Just before this event, Dharmaputra is in a highly dejected mood after seeing his army washed and devastated by the ferocious Bhishma, with no sign of victory on the side of the Pandavas, and almost half their army wiped out! If Bhishma too feels that the Pandavas have no just case, then, what use is this fighting, asks Dharmaraja. He curses himself for all the humiliations that his brothers and wife had to pass through and now wants to return to the forests alone, for a final atonement. Sri Krishna comforts him and brightens up his mood with the following encouraging words:

“Oh King! what is there that I cannot do for you in the war? I shall challenge Bhishma and kill him myself, if Arjuna does not desire it on his own part. Let the Kauravas be witness to it..... The enemy of Pandavas is verily my enemy no doubt. all my people and belongings are yours, and whatever is your interest is mine in reality. Your brother is my friend, relative and pupil. I shall even offer my flesh, by cutting parts of my body myself, for the sake of Arjuna. This best among men is equally prepared to offer his life as sacrifice for my sake.”<sup>4</sup>

Very strong words, these, aren't they? That is Sri Krishna's partiality for Dharma, and hence for the Pandavas.

But is this not unfair on the part of Sri Krishna to have sided with the Pandavas, in a purely fratricidal war, in which he was not really to be concerned, and was to be neutral, as a common friend and relation?

### Was Sri Krishna partial?

This is precisely the question we have answered so long and so elaborately. In a war between good and evil forces, there is no neutrality for a highly cultured person of any civilization with a refined impersonal outlook of concern for the world's welfare. It is like our own generation's Mahatma Gandhi's behaviour in South Africa, his siding with the Blacks against the British, in their struggle for freedom and self-assertion. Not to have so taken sides would have been callously irresponsible! Neutrality is not indifference and irresponsibility but justness of one's stance, and being impartial in one's out look in deciding who is more right. Sri Krishna was outspoken, forthright, straight-forward and consistently uniform in advocating peace, and alternatively backing the Pandavas; there was no wavering, no equivocation, or hypocrisy in it anywhere even once. such politically consistent behaviour, and consequent action is rare indeed in the world's history, which is guided more by questions of “self-interest” than by those of “justness”. If the Westerners have failed to understand Gandhi in this regard, we can only say that they will never understand the personality of Sri Krishna, or his role in the Great War.



As a member of the Yadava community he was equal to the cousin families by allowing them to choose between his army and himself. Duryodhana preferred the Narayana Sena - Sri Krishna's army and the wise Arjuna was happy to have Sri Krishna himself on his side. This is impartiality enough, on social and communal terms. Personal duty and alignment have been, in this case, wisely discriminated from social duty. When a man has to take exceptionally difficult decisions, bound to be controversial one way or the other later on, he has no right to involve his community in it, and allow it to suffer its consequences, as the community as a whole may not have an eye-to-eye understanding or oneness of opinion with its leader in his decisions, and social behaviour is always divided on such occasions. With Sri Krishna out of the communal equation of support to the cousins, Bala Rama was also obliged to be out of it, communally. His personal loyalty was instinctively to Duryodhana, which in this case he was inhibited from expressing, as he did not want to oppose Krishna openly, and he could not decide really on any political matter independently, i.e., without Sri Krishna on his side. Thus another civil war among the Yadavas was avoided, albeit, for the time being. Balarama could not also object to Sri Krishna's being on the side of the Pandavas, personally. That was his private decision with which Balabhadra had nothing to do. Secondly, if Balabhadra was prepared to listen as to the justness of even this private decision of Sri Krishna, he was perhaps welcome for a lengthy discourse by Sri Krishna, justifying his decision to do so. But Balabhadra was not only impatient but also not subtle-enough for the understanding of the niceties involved politically in the matter. Nor was he keen about any personal involvement in it, not being endowed with that deep sense of responsibility and commitment as Krishna was. Besides, Sri Krishna vowed that he would not be a direct participant in the war, and that he would not carry his personal weapons to be used in it. But why so? This is an equal enigma to many, to this day. We must attempt and answer here whatever its satisfactoriness may be to every student of the Mahabharatha.

Negatively speaking, Sri Krishan was never a coward in war, and so we cannot say he was afraid of carrying any weapons.

Regarding his commitment to Pandavas, there was no question of any concealment of his views, and hence there was really no objection to his carrying of any weapons, had he so wanted or decided.

He had used his weapons earlier to destroy the enemies of Dharma, like Naraka, Mura and others. In the case of Kamsa, although he personally killed him, he did not use any weapons, as it was a combat, physical in nature. With respect to Sisupala, Salva, Paundraka and others he did use his Chakra.

From all this it is evident that Sri Krishna made only a limited use of his weapons, to a strict point of necessity, avoiding large-scale blood shedding as far as it was possible.

In the case of the Pandava - Kaurava war, he seems to have made it a policy to avoid even direct involvement, let alone using his weapons, from the very beginning, i.e. from the Rajasuya days. He arranged to send the brothers of Dharmaputra to conquer all the four quarters, and subdue the arrogant princes and bring them under the benevolent emperorship of Dharmaraja. There was no bloodshed in it, and Sri Krishna guided this operation with only a remote control. To eliminate Jarasandha, he used Bhima, and avoided direct intervention in it.

All went well till Sisupala opposed the worship of Sri Krishna publicly in that assembly, and personally, so, direct intervention and the use of Chakra were unavoidable. When he was killed nobody opposed, and no war resulted. So far so good. During the infamous gambling episode itself there might have been bloodshed, if the Pandavas had not chosen to abide by Dharma, and to exercise self-restraint, and had preferred to assert themselves against the cunning of Sakuni. Besides Sri Krishna was neither present there at that time, nor did he know of this humiliation of the princes or of their wife. The suppressed war took some thirteen years to explode! Sri Krishna vowed to conduct the war in an inconspicuous capacity as a mere charioteer of the Prince Arjuna, and Duryodhana made the blunder of

underestimating the importance of Sri Krishna as a supporter of the Pandavas! It is strange that Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Karna who fully knew of Sri Krishna's potentialities, chose to fight against him, and did not effectively warn Duryodhana of the dangers of opposing Sri Krishna. They took for granted, perhaps, a weaponless Sri Krishna as harmless, and concentrated their attention more on Arjuna or Bhima. They forgot that wars are fought with brains and not mere arms and weapons! and unfortunately for them Sri Krishna was the real brain behind all the strategems of the Pandavas. When they realised their mistake, it was too late! and the devastation was complete. But Sri Krishna had served his warnings in advance, clearly, effectively, unequivocally.

### **The elimination of Bhishma**

Sri Krishna had hoped that this wise, elder statesman would keep himself out of the inexorable war. For Bhishma was a devotee of Sri Krishna as an avatar of God, and had proclaimed it loudly in that august assembly of princes gathered at Dharamaja's crowning. The grand old man did not effectively advise Duryodhana against that cunning gambling, as Vidura did. He was also a mute witness of Draupadi's naked exposure to that assembly, and in fact helped the Kauravas by a wrong hint that Dharmaraja had a right to gamble her away, while pretending not knowing the right answer to the self-same question concerning the viability of staking her as a pawn by her husband, as Draupadi questioned him. Unforgivable excess indeed! During all the sufferings of the Pandavas in the forests, he did not even once visit them to comfort them, and continued to play a partisan role, siding with Duryodhana, even up to the capturing of the Cows (the gograhana) of the King Virata, in whose palace and under whose service the Pandavas had chosen to spend their one-year long incognito life. Sri Krishna had observed the conduct of Bhishma in particular. As a common ancestor, he might have opted out of all this shameful behaviour of the Kauravas. He did not. During Sri Krishna's embassy to the royal court of Hastinapur, he had chosen to avoid dining with even Bhishma, clearly noting him and

notifying him as his and the Pandavas' enemy, and had thrown plentiful hints at it while answering Duryodhana's question as to why he avoided dining with even Bhishma or Drona, and had chosen only Vidura's residence. But the warning went unheeded, even in this last moment. Bhishma not only chose to participate in the shameful war, but agreed to play the role of the Commander in Chief! What unabashed steadfastness in the loyalty to evil led him to this blunder, God only knows! The excuse of "partaking Duryodhana's salt" was poor and thinly disguised, as every one knew that it was the other way round! Bhishma's was a case of grand self-deception indeed. Sri Krishna tolerated him for three days. But Bhishma was playing real war and destroying huge contingents of the Pandava army, and there was no let up in his enthusiasm to defeat the already much-wronged princes, if not kill them! Sri Krishna also observed Arjuna's unwillingness to hurt his grand old sire, let alone eliminate him as an adversary. So on the third day he steps into the battlefield as actually a participant in the war, by holding the Chakra in his right hand. This shows that Sri Krishna's vow not to use weapons in this war was more of a strategic nature than of any moral or religious consideration. There was no objection from these latter angles or any other angle, had he chosen so. But under Arjuna's strong persuasion and promise that he would kill Bhishma, Sri Krishna withdraws into his cabin as charioteer. This happens again on the ninth day, by which time more than half of Pandavas' army had been destroyed by the Grand Old Man!

It was Sri Krishna's strategem that saved the Pandavas from this sorry situation. Bhishma must be eliminated. But he was not to die unless he himself so chose! That was the boon that his father had bestowed on him. So how to make him die, or withdraw from war, was the question. Bhishma had already promised to offer help to the Pandavas at the appropriate time. This promise was made on the very opening day to Yudhishtira, in the presence and hearing of Duryodhana! There was no back-stabbing in it. A common ancestor who had wrongly sided with evil, had to make some concession to the good, for whatever degree of atonement that was possible. Bhishma revealed that Shikhandi, the woman-turned-man brother of Draupadi, was really Amba, the Kasi

Princess once abducted by Bhishma, to be married to Vichitravirya by force. That princess who had secretly loved Shalva, was now deserted by both the lover and the would-be-husband; while Bhishma who was so responsible for her sorry plight, would not marry her himself, vowed to celibacy as he was already. So Amba resorted to bringing pressure on Bhishma by Parasu-Rama, his preceptor. But Bhishma chose to fight his teacher to keep his vow of celibacy, and consequently defeated him too. A frustrated Amba self-immolated herself into fire, vowing vengeance on Bhishma. Now it was she in the embodiment of Shikhandi, awaiting her moment of satisfaction under Drupada's umbrella. Bhishma himself knew this, and knew that his days were numbered. Now he chose to help the Pandavas in their moment of helplessness, by revealing that he would not fight a woman, or woman turned man, and in the case of chancing to see one such opposite him on the war-field, he would lay down his own weapons. This was a vow of Bhishma of long-standing nature, but now yielding rich dividends to the Pandavas in their hour of need. Sri Krishna knew this drawback of Bhishma, and simply advised and presurried Dharmaraja to meet Bhishma on the ninth night of the war and to seek his support, and stand helpless on this night. That worked. It was merely cleverness on the part of Sri Krishna that earned this desired result. Bhishma's past, and his vow on one side, Shikhandi on the other, and the tormented conscience of Bhimshma, ready to help the wronged Pandavas at the end, waiting for such an opportunity - all given - Sri Krishna merely acted as a catalyst to bring the sure result into effect quickly. That was all. There was no cunning or trickery used in this case. On the following day Bhishma was the target of Arjuna's arrows with Shikhandi as his shield, and the prey fell to it easily. The question of rightness or wrongness of this method of fight is out of consideration here, as the prey was willing to fall, a vow was to be fulfilled, and fate had to take its course unhindered. A deceitful man had to be defeated by his own methods as Krishna repeatedly explains - mayavi mayaya vadhya. No more chance of escape was to be given. That was all.

## The case of Drona's dismissal

Drona's was a different case. He was no blood relation of the warring cousins. But he was a common teacher of both parties. Temperamentally he was good and justice-minded. He was one of the mightiest of warriors of the age capable of all four types of astras - Brahma, Daiva, Ishu, Parthiva and Asura - known to very few, in those days.<sup>5</sup> He had them all from Parasurama, who taught them open-heartedly, as Drona was also a Brahmin. He commanded the full respect and confidence of even Duryodhana, on account of birth, tradition, caste, learning, brilliance of mind, powers, capability, courage, knowledge and expertise of warfare, polity and capacity for victory, as Duryodhana himself openly reckons at the time of swearing him as the commander-in-chief of his army, at Bhishma's fall.<sup>6</sup> Besides he had power of penance as an additional qualification<sup>7</sup> and was indebted to Duryodhana, for his job, which earned him bread, and used to declare so, openly. He was an old man, about eighty five at the time<sup>8</sup>, and possessed all amiable qualities. It was well known that he had all the four Vedas at the tip of his tongue just as he had eternal presence of mind while holding an aimed arrow in his bow, in hand; and that he could vanquish enemies by both curses and shots!<sup>9</sup> This perfection in penance and archery at the same time, and this combination in one man, had made Drona a rare warrior in those days, and even his worst enemies respected him and feared him. He was a yogi, who could meditate on God even in the war-field and leave his mortal body at will, and this in fact was how he left this world. He was respected even by the ever-arrogant Karna, and while all the army wanted Karna to take over after Bhishma, it was at Karna's instance that Drona was made to head the army.

It is unbelievable that such a man could fall to any mortal man's arrows in any battle-field. But the unbelievable did happen in this case too, as in the case of Bhishma! Both courted the wrath of Sri Krishna, and fell because of their own faults in their character, and their own wicked deeds.

It is amazing in the Mahabharatha war that people well-nigh perfect in characters make blunders of their own choice! Drona's was indeed a very great fall. As the common

preceptor of the cousins, he might have offered neutrality. Drona had no moral courage for this. His main weakness was his fondness for his own son; an only - but wicked minded-son Asvatthama. Duryodhana had drawn this headlong youth onto his side from his childhood. So Drona who was tied to this heavy weight, was drowned in his own infatuation. Drona knew the short temper, fool-hardiness, and tendency for mis-adventures of his son, as Sri Bhagavatham puts it.<sup>10</sup> Drona had not taught him all the esoteric mysteries of Archery for this reason, as he had taught Arjuna, his dearest pupil. Asvashira, Brahmashira and others, were such dangerous weapons. Asvatthama had even quarelled with his father to obtain them by force. But Drona had forestalled any misuse of these by denying him the knowledge of withdrawing them, the *upasamhara vidya*.<sup>11</sup> The cunning and foolish Asvathama wanted to exchange these unusable weapons with Sri Krishna's Sudarshana!<sup>12</sup> Imagine his arrogance and impatience!! It was another matter that Sri Krishna turned him away artfully and tactfully. Drona who had this weakness for his admittedly wicked son, was in the same class with Dhritarastra, for this same reason. The rest of his fine, rare and desirable qualities did not prevent him from committing this common human blunder.

Could there be any other reason for his siding with Duryodhana? Yes; there might have been this one; it was that he was a sworn enemy of Drupada; an one-time classmate, at whose hands he suffered humiliation, later on, when he approached for economic help, being in utter poverty, after Drupada was crowned king of the Panchalas. It was a pity that the power-drunk Drupada turned him out of doors. It was to avenge this humiliation, partly, that Drona had sought shelter under the Kaurava umbrella, under the disguise of preceptor. He was toeing his time for this occasion; as if to enrage him, the Pandavas swore in Drupada's son, Dhrishtadyumna as their army-chief, a "fire-born" fire-brand, whom Drupada had specially obtained as the gift of gods to humiliate and kill Drona, in retaliation for his having been drawn like a bull and tied to the cot of Drona by his pupil Arjuna, as a matter of the Preceptor's Fee (*gurudaksina*). Part of his kingdom had also been taken away by Drona at the time of this strange truce.

There was this background of an escalated cold-war between the Panchalas and Drona, who was now the Kaurava

Chief of army. There was also the additional old background of traditional hatred between the Kaurava - Panchala families, aggravated by Duryodhana's defeat and humiliation at Draupadi's wedding. An insulted Karna had sprinkled salt on this burning wound, as it were, adding insult to injury! Each party was waiting for an opportunity to vanquish the other for two score years or more, and it was unfortunate that a Brahmin got entangled in this Kshatriya feud. Duryodhana's opportunity was thus Drona's opportunity too, and the doors of neutrality were sealed for him, because of his own hot temperament unbecoming of a Brahmin. It was also unfortunate that the innocent Pandavas had to suffer Drona's fury, in spite of Arjuna being a dear-declared pupil by him, times without number. Drona had not, perhaps, taken to Draupadi kindly, for her being his enemy's daughter. There is nothing in the Epic to prove otherwise. Draupadi, for her part, respected him most as her husband's dear preceptor, and actually forgave Asvathama's crime of his butchering her innocent, sleeping sons at midnight, for having been the son of this great teacher.<sup>13</sup> She even offers him respect at this most touching moment of her suffering.

But strangely, Drona swore not to kill Dhrishtadyumna, whom he knew to be his own killer-would-be, by an oracle. Drona even taught this Dhrishtadyumna archery, and other sciences of fighting, as he was bound by the rules of chivalry of those days, not to deny anyone who came to him for training, what he was capable of teaching, unless he was ineligible for a well-known reason.

Such a Drona had too many stakes involved in the war on the side of Duryodhana, to withdraw from it or play neutral. He was never vocal in condemning the atrocities of Duryodhana, not even as much as Bhishma, as he was clearly a paid servant. He was like a government nominee on any government appointed committee, who could never be its hard critic.

He was a silent witness of Draupadi's humiliation in that notorious gambling assembly, and Sri Krishna had noted him down as an opponent of Dharma, as he was a party to its betrayal. Drona never did - never even attempted - to atone for this sin, or clear his name from this blemish.

He never apologised to the Pandavas, nor consoled them. It was not enough to admire his dear pupil Arjuna, while fighting



against him even in the Virata episode. Ineffectual admiration it was, which could not be cashed into anything solid on the side of the Pandavas.

Such a Drona's assumption of the post of the chief of army of the Kauravas was more than what Arjuna or Sri Krishna could suffer. Drona gave a false respectability to the untenability of the cause of the Kauravas by throwing himself on their side.

As if this was not enough, he vowed to capture Yudhishtira alive and hand him over to Duryodhana as a war memento, little thinking of the consequences. This misconceived mis-adventure drew Arjuna into a far-away battle-front with a suicide squad of the Trigarthas, the so-called "Sam Shapthakas", separating him from his main army, leaving none in it brave enough to break the "Chakra Vyuha" - (a mysterious circular arrangement of the army,) or even enter it. The plan was to end the war with a total defeat for the Pandavas! The fourteen year old young but brave son of Arjuna, Abhimanyu who plunged into it "like river Ganga plunging into the Sea"<sup>14</sup> was a veritable but uncalculated disaster for the Kaurava army, and Drona was the shameful cause of the slaughter of this boy in ignoble circumstances, in an unjust, unheroic way, under his express and manifestly unethical orders and directions, and even direct and disgusting, demeaning involvement. The Chakra-vyuha was such strange arrangement of the army that only three people other than Drona could break it into shreds: The first was Sri Krishna himself, the second was Arjuna, and the third was Pradyumna, Sri Krishna's son by Rukmini. Abhimanyu knew only half that skill, up to entering its core, but did not know how to disentangle himself out of it.<sup>15</sup>

When Abhimanyu charged himself into it bringing calamity on the Kaurava Army and destroying it with all his might, no warrior could offer him successful fight or withstand him - not Duryodhana, not Drona even personally!

Then in a strange cowardly combination some twelve "hero"s (atirathas and maharathas) together fell on this mere boy, throwing all war regulations, ethics and principles to the wind. - Drona, Asvatthama, Kripa, Karna, Kritavarma, Sakuni, Brihadbala, Shalya, Bhurisravas, Shala, Paurava and Vrisasena. <sup>16</sup>

Drona was the first to break the norms of war in this respect! (How could he show his face to the noble heroes on either side hereafter?) They began to shoot arrows at him simultaneously from all sides, while chivalry expected not even the hunting of a wild animal in this brutal manner!! Abhimanyu made this evil combination retreat, being the chip of the old block! Then it is to the permanent discredit of Drona that he issues the following foul order to **attack him from behind, and finish, somehow :-**

"His shield on the chest is unbreakable, and the boy is growing in courage. It was I who taught his father how to tie this shield on his chest, and so no question of attacking him from the front. He knows all that I taught his father. We can only disarm him, by breaking his bow, cutting his arrows, killing his horses, his charioteer, wheel protectors and other assistants by well-aimed arrows. Karna, you do this, if you can, **by coming from behind him, as none can stand before him.**"<sup>17</sup>

At this shameless and treacherous order, an eternally shameless Karna attacked the boy from behind and disarmed him. The King of Bhoja killed his horses, and Kripa his Charioteer and assistants. When the boy charged with a mere sword in hand, away, down from his chariot, **it was Drona again that cut off that hand equipped with the sword!** Karna destroyed his shield. Abhimanyu takes up a chariot wheel into that remnant of an arm and further dashes against his adversaries, particularly against Drona. When that wheel was shattered, he took up a mace in the other arm, and attacks Dussasana's son with it. It was finally this ruffian's son that delivered the final fatal blow with his mace to finish Abhimanyu.

A voice from the skies declared that "it was an unfair act for six maharathis to surround one young boy, and shameful for people like Drona, and Karna in particular, to have done this."<sup>18</sup>

Now how does Drona deserve a fair end to his life, for his part, while he denied it to a noble adversary? Once all rules are broken and a free-for-all situation, a stampede virtually, is created, the fellow that initiates disorder has no right to demand fairplay from his enemies in his own case. It is ridiculous that the admirers of Duryodhana and his camp put the blame on Sri Krishna to have ended Drona in tricky circumstances.

Sri Krishna was now free, and justifiably so, to adopt his own means and strategies to dispose off the Kuru Chiefs of war one by one. In this case of Drona he wanted someone to tell Drona that his son was killed, whether this was true or false, as the news would disenchant Drona from out of war, automatically. This was foul under normal circumstances, no doubt. But under the altered foul circumstances, foulness was to be met with by foulness only as Sri Krishna repeatedly states.<sup>19</sup> When someone said so (that Asvatthama was killed) Drona would not believe easily; Bhima had to kill an elephant by that name and belonging to the King of Malava, and then with a piercing sense of shame from within, shouted loudly that Asvatthama was no more. This was not uttering a lie, after all, since it was true in a way, although there was a deliberate confusion sought to be created in the name of a man, with that of an elephant. Drona would not still believe. How to make him believe?

On the opening day of the war, when Yudhishtira had approached Drona for blessings of success, Drona had promised to lay down arms on hearing a supremely unpleasant piece of news. It was on this clue that Sri Krishna acted so far. Now it required the personal agency of Dharmaraja himself to make Drona believe this! But that prince without common sense or presence of mind, even in this crisis would not tell this much of a lie, or even a truth that had the mere semblance of a lie. Finally he was made to state that "what had been killed was Aswatthama the elephant." (**Asvathama hatah Kunjarah.**) Sri Krishna eclipsed the word "elephant" with a loud sound of his conch blown at this very instant, leaving the rest for Drona's calculated hearing, which brought about the desired result. Drona was about to engage the ferocious Brahmastra to destroy all the Panchalas even in that final moment, when all great Rishis like Vasishta, Bharadwaja, Jamadagni, Visvamitra and so on assemble in the skies to tell him that **the War that Drona was fighting was foul, and he must lay down his arms.**<sup>20</sup> It was all the more unbecoming of a well learned Brahmin, well versed in all the Vedas and Vedangas to engage himself in such war, and use Brahmastra against helpless, and armless soldiers, they point out. Drona was filled with shame for once at this point, even so he hesitates for a moment and then he realises the truth that he was fighting on

the wrong side, and by wrong means. He lays down his bow and arrows, blessing the Pandavas for a final victory, loudly. He then sits down in Padmasana in a yogic posture. Dhristadyumna seizes this opportunity and removes the head of Drona with his sword. But by then Drona's soul had departed from his body to unite with God Vishnu, Purana Purusha, and this departure of his inner Flame was actually seen by five people only, Sri Krishna, Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Kripa and Sanjaya, the narrator.

Now, therefore, Sri Krishna was merely instrumental in destroying Drona's misguided enthusiasm to fight, by causing Dharmaraja speak that truth to the effect of an untruth. It was the Rishis who finally put him to shame and brought him to stop the war. Besides, Drona left this life of his own accord, being itched by the wrongs he had already done to the Pandava camp.

There is a pertinent remark by Bhima in this juncture which highlights Drona's fault:

"If well-trained bad Brahmins had restrained themselves from entering this war field, and had been pleased with their natural social and individual duties (like learning and teaching) so many millions of Kshatriyas might not have lost their lives in this senseless war. They say that Non-violence to all living things is the highest Dharma in life, and that Brahmins are the trusted custodians of this ideal. You, Drona! are the best of Brahman-knowers! But just for the sake of one man (Duryodhana or Aswathama), you have behaved like one who cooks the flesh of a dog, and like uncultured brutes, have indulged in the slaughter of millions of innocent people, out of your ignorance, and infatuation for your son, wife, and wealth!! Having overstepped your rightful social duties, you have harmed and killed people discharging their appointed, rightful duties - is there no sense of shame in you?"<sup>21</sup>

This was unforgiveable transgression of duties - Varna sankara - according to Sri Krishna. There were the added brutalities also and violations of all norms of fighting by him, as explained so far, and so Drona deserved the treatment he met with at the end. He had only himself to blame and Sri Krishna acted as no more than a mere dispenser of the sentence on him and his conduct.

It is true, however, that without Sri Krishna's strategem none could have vanquished Drona and despatched him the way he disappeared from life.

## **Saindhava and Bhurisravas and their disposal**

There are two more minor episodes that deserve our attention in scrutinising Sri Krishna's role during Drona's army-chieftaincy. The first is that of Jayadratha, the Saindhava, and the only son in law of Dhritarashtra. This was the fellow who had abducted Draupadi in the forests, towards the conclusion of the exile of the Pandavas, in the manner of Ravana of Ramayana fame! This was the fellow who had prevented Bhima and party from following Abhimanyu as his escorts into the Chakra Vyuh. Arjuna naturally vowed to kill him before the next sunset, failing which he would immolate himself in fire. Drona tried to save this wicked fellow by forming another Vyuh, the Padma one, this time. Drona almost succeeded in preventing Arjuna from sighting Jayadratha, till about a few minutes before sunset on that fatal day. Jayadratha was doubly shielded as it were, first by Drona's ability and then by his own father's boon that one who would remove his head should die of an explosion in his own head.

How to save Arjuna, and dispose off his adversary was Sri Krishna's natural worry.

Sri Krishna resorts to his Divine powers as God Incarnate this time, forgetting that he had to act like a man only, in this Avatar as in Ramavatar, and causes sudden darkness on the battlefield, while the Sun had not still set! This was made visible only to the eyes of Jayadratha, to fool him, and draw him out of the protecting wall of body-guards, volutarily! The fooled Jayadratha rushes out of that hiding place to enjoy vulgarly the scene of Arjuna's immolating himself. Sri Krishna could create this illusion for Jayadratha, says Vyasa, because he was a Yogin, and he did so out of his mysterious powers, Yoga, being the Lord of Yogins, Sri Hari Himself.<sup>22</sup> This was not clear to the rest of the army, which thought that Saindhava had voluntarily rushed out of his hiding resort, foolishly, to meet with his own end! On the human plane, Sri Krishna stands entirely blameless, while as Antaryamin, the Indweller in Saindhava, he punishes him by bestowing on him a deception of his senses and pushing him to his deserved end.

This is not all! When Saindhava rushed out of hiding so foolishly, Sri Krishna instructed Arjuna to remove his head with a powerful arrow and shoot it in the air to waft it into the lap of his aged father Vriddhakshatra, who was miles and miles away, doing meditation, so that when the old man woke to senses and stood up in surprise, he could be instrumental in causing that cut off head to roll down on the earth in the dust! It was thus the head of the wicked boon-giver that was blown up in explosion, and Arjuna was saved. Vriddhakshatra was no innocent man, and his power of penance was dangerous, as he was not a self-conquered man; would any sensible man, otherwise, have blessed his son with such an astonishing boon? So Sri Krishna decided that it must recoil on the originator of this enemy of mankind. Abnormal powers in insane hands can only act in an inhuman way!

Again Sri Krishna's conduct is vindicated!!

Bhurisravas' was a slightly different case. He was one of the tormentors of Abhimanyu in his helpless last moments, and acting on Drona's treacherous orders against his independent moral thinking.

In a terrific battle with Satyaki, the only Yadava hero who was on the side of the Pandavas, and who was Sri Krishna's own well trained dear disciple in archery, Bhurishravs is locked up with him in a 'life or death' type of struggle, and reaches a point of vantage, and lifts up his sword-holding hand to finish him off. Sri Krishna who sees this draws Arjuna's urgent attention and action. At this instance Arjuna shoots a fierce arrow to cut off that uplifted hand of Bhurisravas, to save Satyaki in time. Apparently this was also against the code of war of those days, to intervene in the fight between two locked up warriors! But let us remember that Bhurisravas was the first to break that code earlier, in the instance of slaughtering Abhimanyu under Drona's instigation. How could he now invoke that self-same code which he had dishonoured himself so brazenly? His angry outbursts against Arjuna, invoking violated and good-for-nothing codes, so rendered by himself earlier, provoked only Arjuna's ridicule. Arjuna uses an ingenious argument also that Satyaki was no more than his own right hand, and in saving him and cutting off of Bhurisravas' arm, he was doing nothing more than self-protection and thus

intervention between two warriors was really ruled out! He also taunts him about his behaviour at Abhimanuy's slaying.

A dumb-struck, silenced and disgusted Bhurisravas resorts to fast unto death (Prayopaveshana), for self-purification. He was also a Yogi, like Bhishma and Drona, and knew the secret path of samadhi as taught by the Mahopanishat (Srimad Ashtakshara Brahma Vidya) - comments Vyasa.<sup>23</sup> While the surrounding soldiers were abusing Arjuna and Sri Krishna, for this intervention in a private combat, Arjuna was engaged in defending himself by recounting the manner of Abhimanyu's slaughter and the role of Bhurisravas in it. An angered Satyaki rushed to the squatting Bhurisravas and removed his head, as Drona was to be treated later on, similarly!

Strangely enough, Sri Krishna grants the soul of Bhurisravas Moksha, final liberation from bondage, and entry into the Immortal World, (in the manner in which Lord Rama grants Jatayu the same coveted position in the Ramayana) with these words : "Oh thou! intermittant Performer of Agnihotra and other great yagas. Attain thou immediately my Immortal World beyond blemish, and ever illuminated; that world desired by even Brahma and others in vain; and become equal to me and eligible to ride my divine vehicle the heavenly bird Garuda."<sup>24</sup>

Bhurisravas was essentially a good soul but in bad company. He had to be punished for his fault and prevented from inflicting more harms on the Pandava army; and at the same time rewarded for his otherwise good daily conduct. Hence this strange combination of punishment and reward by Sri Krishna.

We are now slowly stepping into Sri Krishna's personality of Yogi and God, from a mere superficial human understanding, as is evident to the readers, perhaps. For it would be difficult to explain this conduct of Sri Krishna entirely on the assumption that he was but man at the height of superhuman character. The supernatural creeps into the Epic slowly but surely hereafter, throwing us into the world of undecipherable mysteries, as is evidenced in the disposal of Karna.

## The disposal of Karna

Karna is one of the most complex cases of the Mahabharatha heroes and most common readers do not know many of his sides. They confuse themselves between the original Karna of the Epic by Veda Vyasa and other unauthorised versions and their variations in local vernacular poems, stories and popular myths about him. Veda Vyasa's is no creation of the figment of imagination but a historical picturing of a complex reality and we are concerned here only with this authentic presentation in the Epic. The readers who may know all the details we are presenting here may check up the accuracy or otherwise of their own versions with this themselves, and can draw their conclusions.

Karna was in reality the son of Kunti, born of her in her maiden state, under the influence of the Sun-god. He was unfortunate to be renounced by his mother. We certainly pity him the denial of royal rights that go by birth and the privileges he might have had like the other Pandavas.

But Kunti was equally helpless under the social circumstances, fearing public wrath, and consequences to the royal palace, and of course her own future. She was too young to know all the consequences at once when she was tempted to use one of the manthras that Durvasa granted her, being pleased with her treatment to him at her father's palace. The undesirable thing did happen and she begot the child, and was forced to forsake him.

Karna was no ordinary child. He had on him a nature made shield on his chest given by the gods as it were, and was born with divine ear-rings also, a miracle indeed, that proclaimed his superhuman origin. The child set floating in a box on Ganga reached the hands of Adiratha, a Suta, by birth, who was childless and was hungering after one.

A Suta is of no mean origin as most people think. A Suta was a child by a Brahmin mother and of a Kshatriya father, in a converse type (Pratiloma) of marriage. Although Sutas were restricted from taking to Soldiery, they could get all the learning of the world, and live honourable positions in palaces, like serving as story tellers, charioteers of Emperors, and doing other dignified jobs. The minister of Dasharatha, Sumanthra by



name, belonged to this category and Solar race. Suta Pauranika, the illustrious disciple of Veda Vyasa and of Vaishampayana, who narrated the Mahabharatha and other Puranas to the congregations of the world's wisest sages at Shaunaka's Sattra sacrifice, was another illustrious example of this category and was actually a contemporary of the Mahabharatha heroes. Sanjaya, the minister of Dhritarashtra, who narrated the highlights of war to the blind King day after day, and who was endowed with divine visionary powers by his preceptor, Bhagavan Veda Vyasa, was another example. These were no mean persons, and their category was another example. It was not because of caste that Karna suffered! That is a lie created by ignorant opportunists, and being perpetuated by politicians and self proclaimed social reformers, to create confusion in our midst. Karna suffered mainly because of his own character, his arrogance, his unbounded ambition, his association with Duryodhana, Shakuni and other evil master-minds that brought about a needless political deluge. The virtues he possessed like devotion to God and the Godly, his supreme capacity for self-sacrifice and charity, trusting of friends etc. did not shine or save him, because of his boastfulness, instigation for mischief of the already misguided and deluded prince Duryodhana, his lack of respect to the elders in polity, his uncontrollable itch for loose talking, and thinking too much of himself. His training as soldier under Parasurama, and the knowledge of divine weapons were of no avail in the nick of time of their absolute need by him, under the preceptor's very curse, as he deceived him about his origin and early circumstances. Karna was no child when he was learning archery under Parasurama! His ambition tempted him into the fatal lie! Except for these drawbacks in his character, he was perhaps as good a marksman as Arjuna, with whom he entertained an absolutely untenable rivalry, till his last moment. We shall grant that it was the warrior's blood in his veins that kept egging him in for adventure and ambition, irrespective of his altered circumstances by Fate, in collusion with his innocent mother; we shall pity the circumstances, but not the man, who had ample opportunity to shape his character into a morally great one by avoiding the wrong things and persons to whom he clung in a misplaced sense of loyalty.

Karna had no business to interfere in the feuding cousin-family affairs, had he had no really believable ambitions to use these as occasions to improve his importance and indispensability to Duryodhana. From the day he was crowned King of the Angas by the unauthorised Duryodhana, and silently seconded by the Blind old Emperor at the Prowess-display-function in the Royal Arena, when the cousins were in their teen-age still, Karna realised his importance in the political situation of the day, and clung strong to Duryodhana. Not that Duryodhana was any social revolutionary; for he did not respect all the Sutas of the day or even lower ranking people! He had scant respect for even his uncle, Prime minister Vidura, who was treated as Shudra, although son of Veda Vyasa. The respect he did not give to high ranking political luminaries of the day, due to their caste, or hierarchy, or merit (like Bhishma and Drona), he gave to Karna, not on any caste basis or personal merit, but simply because he could be used as a treasured weapon in his armoury against Arjuna, at the appropriate moment in the future war, for which he was preparing obviously from that very day, if not earlier!. Karna fell into this trap irretrievably surrendering his soul and discrimination to Mephistophiles as it were.

His numerous encouragements to Duryodhana and his countless instigations to heap suffering and humiliation on the innocent Pandavas who had wronged him in no way, are too well known to be recounted here. These were what branded him as "one of the four evil genii" (dushta chatustaya) by Veda Vyasa himself, as an impartial narrator of the sequences of events in the Epic.

We shall just mention one or two here to nail the lie about his virtues, and his being wronged by the Pandavas or Sri Krishna.

At the time of the disgraceful gambling and the consequent attempt to expose Draupadi naked in that notorious assembly, it was Karna that suggested for the first time that Draupadi deserved to be thrown naked there, as she was no more than a prostitute, being wedded to five husbands! This was not Duryodhana's original wicked idea at all, and he would appear for once as a saint before this satanic Karna, in this instance.<sup>25</sup> Karna vulgarly enjoyed all the evil doings of the

Kauravas in that assembly. Can we say that this trait came to him because of the caste in which he was reared up and bred? This is self-causation, leading to destiny; a case of character as chosen to be built up by the individual. If Karna was innately great he should have played neutral and refused to be a party to this unbecoming conduct. He was here actually encouraging and enjoying everything every moment. The Pandavas (and Sri Krishna who came to know of these details, later on) noted him as a direct party to this evil and marked him for elimination.

It was Karna again who egged Duryodhana for a display of the wealth of the Kauravas before the pining Pandavas in their exile in the forests, under the excuse of "Counting the cows in the forest pens" (Ghosha Yatra.) What greater sadist tendencies still locked up in him were awaiting open manifestation in his character is evidenced in such instances. This time it recoiled on himself and his friend, and when Gandharwas took Duryodhana captive, Karna was the first to run away.

During the "gograhana" - "Cow-capturing" episode on the outskirts of Virata's Kingdom, Karna insults Drona and the entire Brahmin caste in unprintably abusive words,<sup>26</sup> under the delusion that he himself is the sole trustworthy friend and supporter of Duryodhana. This time too it backfires, as Asvatthama, the fire-brand, retorts in an equally abusive language and wants to slay Karna then and there. Duryodhana gets embarrassed, instead of being helped by Karna in such numerous instances.

Karna had no respect for even Bhishma whom he suspected as a double-dealer, always, in his extreme enthusiasm for Duryodhana's evil and unjustified cause. Clashes between Bhishma and Karna are notorious and fill whole pages in the Udyoga Parvan. Particularly at the ceremony of swearing in of Bhishma as the commander in chief of the army of the Kauravas, Karna loses his temper, abuses the aged sire and walks away in a huff, swearing that he would never serve under Bhishma during his command of the army! This trusted friend of Duryodhana was thus not available in his service for ten full days out of the eighteen days of the blasted war!. What short temper! What loose tongue! What scant respect for age

and experience! How can one pity him for these? Can we say that these crept up into his nature because of his wronged circumstances by his mother or society? Karna asks for forgiveness of the fallen sire, privately, in the battlefield on the night of the 10th day. But by then enough harm had happened to the Pandavas, and also the Kauravas, and Karna did nothing at any time to patch up the lost love between the cousins. This is the weakest point of this hero's character. He never showed any maturity of mind, any wisdom due in a mighty warrior, and never acted responsibly.

His worst instance of conduct was during the slaying of Abhimanyu from behind! Drona, of course, instructed him to do that. But where were the discriminatory powers of this much pitied hero? Why did he not refrain from this demeaning act? Was it caste that instigated him? Karna has himself to blame for all this.

Sri Krishna lost all regard for Karna at this point perhaps. His earlier "exploits" were enough to condemn him in any pair of respectable eyes. But this was irredeemable self-condemnation, perhaps.

Let us study Sri Krishna's relations with him, stage by stage.

When the grand attempt at mediation and the royal embassy of Sri Krishna failed, and war became a notorious certainty, Sri Krishna stays at Hastinapur still finding possible ways to prevent this calamity.

One of them was to approach Karna, and reveal to him his real birth as Kunti's son, with the hope that the result would be beneficial to the world either way. If Karna felt overjoyed to learn that he was of a royal birth, and agreed to be crowned on the throne of Hastinapur, the feud between the cousins would end! The Pandavas would respect their first brother and withdraw their claim for the throne; Duryodhana's loud proclaimed friendship and love for Karna should not stand in the way of this dear friend's being crowned as Supreme Emperor, if the earlier gesture of crowning him King of Angas was genuine and really meant elevating one who deserved it by virtue. This would put Duryodhana's loyalty to test too! If all went well, a mighty war would be avoided and averted; justice done to one deceived by destiny and society while the Pandava

princes would at least live honourably, even if without earning any tangible power or glory. It was indeed a sacrifice on their part! The suggestion was a master-stroke, though made without taking the Pandavas into confidence earlier, as Sri Krishna was sure of their concurrence, in the event of Karna's and Duryodhana's agreement. There was nothing undesirable in it. Karna's excuse that this would be treachery to Duryodhana is hardly convincing to any real peace-lover. If neither Duryodhana nor the Pandavas really grudged him his due place on the throne of power, though at this late hour, and if Karna accepted it under duress of the well-wishers and in the larger interest of humanity, how could anyone view it as opportunistic? And if the vulgar did view it so, why should have Karna worried about it? Did he really worry about his reputation earlier, in all his evil support to Duryodhana? In fact here was an occasion and an opportunity to set right his image in public eyes. But he let it go. Krishna's was no fake offer! For, if Karna had shown any inclination for peace or had mellowed at this strange secret news that he was the eldest of the Pandavas, Sri Krishna would have moved the higher ups like Bhishma, Dhritarashtra, Kripa, Drona and even Vyasa, to bring pressure on Duryodhana, had he chosen to opt out of Karna's friendship, by any chance! Duryodhana would have been censured with one voice by the whole world then. Why did not Karna really agree for this honourable solution?

We can only say that it would have left him without a prime motive force for the rest of his life - fighting with Arjuna - and required him to recast his character entirely in a new mould. Karna was not capable of that. He could not eschew the evil that he had so dearly befriended and did not have the guts to speak the truth that he had so lately learned, publicly! On the contrary he thought that the truth would brook no injury to the well nourished friendship between him and the evil Duryodhana. He sacrificed truth for friendship and ambition!

Suppose this truth had been revealed to him much earlier, before the cultivation of Duryodhana's loyalty, would he have been a different man?

This is a difficult hypothetical question to answer. But given his true inborn traits of ambition, sadism, boastfulness and lack of respect for elders etc., he might have been a liability

even to Pandavas, and the course of history would have been unimaginably different! These vices would not have endeared him to anyone in any caste, in any camp. Are there not politicians unwanted in any political party today, and whom everybody is afraid of opposing and incapable of throwing out? Karna was one such of those days, perhaps. Given the vices that he possessed, it was not in his nature to have reached any responsible position of power. His capacity for back-biting, ribaldry, garrulousness, gossip and sadism had made him a rabid personality that only Duryodhana, Sakuni, and Dussasana could enjoy or tolerate. His few virtues got drowned in this ocean of viciousness and this is the real tragic sense of his destiny.

Meanwhile Veda Vyasa himself answers our question by making Karna say that he knew that he was the son of Kunti, long ago, but could not forsake his foster parents.<sup>27</sup> This is touching indeed! He was practically inhabited in the Suta community and coming out of it was an impossibility socially. If he accepted Emperorship, he swears, he would vacate it again for Duryodhana!<sup>28</sup> This is self-perpetuation in Evil, indeed! Now it is this evil tendency in Karna that landed him in tragedy. Loyalty is a virtue indeed, but not to evil! It was this misplaced loyalty that instigated him and induced him to share many of the evils with Duryodhana.

When Karna was sworn as the captain of the Kaurava Army he had lost all regard and respect and mercy from Sri Krishna and Arjuna. But for this background, Sri Krishna's approach here might seem arbitrary or unjustified. But Karna's history was there to justify what he deserved at Sri Krishna's hands.

First, nobody was ready to be his Charioteer. Shalya had to be enticed to doing it by making him listen to discourses about Puranic myths, about how even Brahma accepted driving the chariot of Shiva while slaying the Three Asuras of Tripura. An unwilling Shalya takes up the reins of the horses in his hands, on condition that Karna must always respect his advice and give up self-boastfulness, as otherwise he would step down his position, the moment he was disobeyed by Karna! None too good an augury for Karna!!

This Shalya who had been trapped into Duryodhana's camp, and was willing to make amends to Dharmaraja's side, had

promised the latter that he would try to calm down the spirits of Karna, should an occasion arise for him to act as his charioteer.

But how could anyone know in advance as to the need of Shalya becoming the charioteer of Karna, in future? We can only say, that such wild hypothetical gambling in expectations, and speculations, were common, and all sorts of permutations and combinations were being calculated by able warriors, who knew mutual limitations. Bhishma was not expected to fight long, with divided loyalties, and Shikhandin awaiting vengeance. Drona was expected to fall quickly, too for similar reasons. Karna's weaknesses were too well known too, and his caste factor which prohibited real warriors from undertaking to be his charioteer. These calculations came true, and that was all.

Shalya takes the earliest opportunity to free himself from this imposed duty after suitably advising Karna against boastfulness. Karna hits back by abusing Shalya and his countrymen's manners and customs! What absence of mind! It was at the moment when Karna aimed the ferocious Nagastra at the throat of Arjuna that Shalya pointed out its inadvisability. An angered Karna replied that he would never make adjustments in his aim, once the aiming was done.

But Sri Krishna uses his Yogic powers this time too to press Arjuna's Chariot by about a foot's depth into the earth so that the weapon knocked off Arjuna's crown only and Shalya's wisdom was vindicated to the dismay of Karna. When the weapon reapproached Karna for being re-employed, Karna refused to admit it into his armoury with the reply that he had vowed to use an arrow once and once only in war. This steadfastness about using arrows only once, and taking aims once only is likely to be the result of his vanity of comparing himself with Sri Rama of Ramayana, more than of any principle of chivalry as this same hero had no such scruple to break the principle while attacking Ahbimanyu from behind.

Shalya deserts him at this point of disobedience. Indeed Karna's plight is pitiable, on our forgetting his earlier deeds. His chariot wheels get stuck up in the quagmire of blood and clay on the field; with no charioteer to draw the horses, he tries to lift up those clogged wheels with one hand, while holding

the reins of the horses with the other, praying for time from his very adversary, Arjuna. Meanwhile the Bhargavastra that he wanted to employ could not come into his memory by formula (manthra), and he had long ago gifted away his chest-shield with which he was born, and his divine earrings too. With nobody to assist him, and no shield to save him, no weapon to remember, he cuts a sorry figure before Arjuna, who really pities him. Karna quotes lengthy precious rules to be observed on the battle field, which he had himself broken earlier.

It is Sri Krishna - not Arjuna - that replies him and the words indicate Sri Krishna's attitude to Karna and this war :

"Karna! How fortunate of you to remember Dharma now that you are in trouble! How is it you did not remember it when you caused Draupadi to be dragged into the court hall with a single piece of cloth on her? When you all deceived Dharmaraja at the dice, a game which he did not know, how could you forget the same Dharma?..... When you said to Draupadi tauntingly that she must desert her husbnads to choose a fresh one, how did that Dharma escape you ? When you and many others surrounded that disarmed boy Abhimanyu against all canons of war, why did you forget the same Dharma?..."<sup>29</sup>

Karna was filled with a profound sense of shame and could not attempt any reply, reports Veda Vyasa. Sri Krishna then directs Arjuna to finish off the day's battle with - Karna's death. So was Karna's death brought about by his own adharma on the seventeenth day of the battle. Karna entertained self-deception even in the last moment, as his following words would indicate :

"Elders who are versed in Dharma say indeed that Dharma protects one who is wedded to it. We are always following that Dharma, to the best of our ability, and the best of our knowledge of it. That (bloody) Dharma however has been killing us here instead of protecting us. Therefore I conclude that Dharma does not always protect."<sup>30</sup>

Karna appears a very small man in these words. He understood Dharma as a set of rituals perhaps, like observing Sandhyopasana (meditation on Gayathri) three times a day, giving alms to the needy and charity to beggars, going to temples or places of Sacrifices etc. but not as an eternal



guiding principle in all our activities, every moment in our lives. He never for a moment considered the propriety of humiliating a queen in an assembly as involving Dharma; or of his loyalty to Duryodhana involving the same question. He never saw Dharma as the be all of life. There are plenty of people in our midst even today like Karna who remember Dharma in isolated moments of personal distress, and who forget it while seeing the distress of others! Even a robber by profession could be Dharmic by Karna's standards, if he can pay gifts of gold and silver to temples out of his daily loot! There are our tax evaders, black marketeers, politicians, all of whom want to cash on Dharma for practical pragmatic daily uses. Unfortunately for them Dharma eludes them!

Karna is a pigmy by the standards of Bhishma and Drona and where they themselves erred, how could Karna be wise with his innate wicked tendencies?

Sri Krishna was absolutely justified in eliminating him mercilessly, when Karna had no mercy for other innocent sufferers of Duryodhan's wrong policies. It was Shukra Niti that Sri Krishna employed in all these cases.

### **Aswatthama's end**

We have already discussed this episode in detail earlier. Aswathama was a rash, impetuous, unthinking, fool-hardy youth. It was totally unbecoming of him to have killed the sleeping Panchalas and the five sons of Draupadi, at the dead of night, after all the war was over. He was the "Chieftain" of Kaurava army, when that army was no more, when their leader was half-dead lying on the battlefield, and when there were no adversaries alive to be defeated in the opposite army. He deluded himself into being such a war chief, under Duryodhana's prattles in his delirium on the war-field.

As if this was not enough he threw the apandavasthra against the enemy camp, reducing even abhimanyu's child as embryo in Uttara's womb, into ashes.

Sri Krishna brings this child back to life under his Yogic powers again, and it should now be evident that without him the Pandavas would not have even lived, let alone seen their victory!

Sri Krishna does not let go Aswathama unpunished. He tells him:

“Although you have destroyed the progeny of the Pandavas by a sacred weapon never meant to be used, that progeny will come back to life at my instance. But all wise people will know you as a coward, a sinner, and a man of inferior breed, hereafter. You are a child-killer, idiot! take thou this curse from me. You shall move about this earth in incognito, roaming from place to place, helplessly, particularly in deserted places, for three thousand years. You are unfit to live in the midst of society. May your body be infested by all sorts of diseases, causing in it putrefication, foul odours and bad blood. (Get out.)<sup>30</sup>

This is long life without its blessings, mistaken for immortality! What greater loss could there be for a Brahmin than of his purity of body and mind, his daily meditation and the bliss of Divine Union in Yoga?

One can see Sri Krishna's complete self-involvement in the cause of Dharma in such profuse instances.

Even in the manner of causing Duryodhana's death we can see it. We have already discussed the implications of it in discussing Sri Krishna's role in Jarasandha's death. Reminding Bhima of his vow by sign, so that he might hit him below his belt, on his own terms, Sri Krishna never bothered about right means, after Abhimanyu's slaughter, as is evident. They who break rules of war have no right to invoke them in their distress.

All is fair in War and love today. It is strange that there are still people interested in ascertaining Sri Krishna's fairness of means, when there is not an iota of Dharma in today's warfare.

We have pointed out whatever can be said in this matter with patience and perseverance.

One last question:

Why did not Sri Krishna directly participate in the war then, using his own weapons?

(1) Had he taken up open arms, perhaps many cunning evil minded princes might have eluded any clear alignment, and the world would not have been rid of them once for all, which Sri Krishna did not wish.

(2) The war might have resulted directly between him and the Kauravas, in which case Bhishma, Drona and others might have played real neutrality, and the desired clearing of the political mess totally, might not have occurred.

(3) He would also have denied in that case a proper course of logical action to an unbridgeable hatred between the cousin families, in which they and they alone had to take main roles, and justice had to be done to the sufferers.

(4) There is the larger philosophical argument that God never acts directly in human affairs, but uses human agencies for His broader Impersonal Purposes. But this takes us on to Sri Krishna's role as God in the Epic, which is our next and final topic.

## Chapter 4

१. ऊर्ध्वबाहुः विरौम्येष न च कश्चित् शृणोति मे ।  
धर्मादर्थश्च कामश्च स किमर्यं न सेव्यते ॥ (स्वर्गरोहण, ५-६२)
२. ममैव त्वं तवैवाहं ये मदीयास्तवैव ते ।  
यस्त्वां द्वेष्टि स मां द्वेष्टि यस्त्वामनु स मामनु ॥  
नरस्त्वमसि दुर्घर्ष हरिर्नारायणोह्यहम् ।  
काले लोकमिमं प्राप्तौ नरनारायणावृषी ॥  
अनन्यः पार्थ मत्तस्त्वम् त्वत्तश्चाहं तथैव च ।  
नावयोरन्तरं शक्यं वेदितुं भरतर्षभ ॥ (Vana 12-45, to 47)
३. नाहं कामान्न संरम्भान्न द्वेषान्नार्थकारणात् ।  
न हेतुवादाल्लोभाद्वा धर्मं जह्यां कथंचन ॥  
संप्रीतिभोज्यानान्नानि आपद्भोज्यानि वा पुनः ।  
न च संप्रीयसे राजन् न चैवापद्रता वयम् ॥  
अकस्मात् द्वेष्टि वै राजन् जन्मप्रभृति पाण्डवान् ।  
प्रियानुवर्तिनो भ्रातृन् सर्वैः समुदितान् गुणैः ॥  
अकस्माच्चैव पार्थानां द्वेषणं नोपपद्यते ।  
धर्मे स्थिताः पाण्डवेयाः कस्तान् किं वकुमर्हति ॥  
यस्तान् द्वेष्टि स मां द्वेष्टि यस्ताननु स मामनु ।  
एकान्त्यं मां गतं विधि पाण्डवैर्धर्मचारिभिः ॥  
कामक्रोधानुवर्ती हि यो मोहाद् विरुरुत्सति ।  
गुणवन्तं च यो द्वेष्टि तमाहुः पुरुषाधमम् ॥  
यः कल्याणगुणान् ज्ञातीन् मोहाल्लोभाद् दिदृक्षते ।  
सोऽजितात्मा जितक्रोधो न चिरं तिष्ठति श्रियम् ॥  
द्विषदन्नं न भोक्तव्यं द्विषन्तं नैव भोजयेत् ।  
पाण्डवान् द्विषसे राजन् मम प्राणा हि पाण्डवाः ॥  
सर्वमेतन्न भोक्तव्यं अन्नं दुष्टाभिसंहितम् ।  
क्षत्रुरेकस्य भोक्तव्यं इति मे धीयते मतिः ॥ (Udyoga, 91-24 to 32)
४. त्वत्प्रयुक्तो महाराज किं न कुर्यां महाहवे ।  
हनिष्यामि रणे भीष्ममाहूय पुरुषर्षभम् ।

पश्यतां धार्तराष्ट्राणां यदि नेच्छति फाल्गुनः ॥  
यः शत्रुः पाण्डुपुत्राणां मच्छत्रुः न संशयः ।  
मदर्था भवदीया ये ये मदीयास्तवैव ते ॥  
तव भ्राता मम सखा सम्बन्धी शिष्य एव च ।  
मांसान्युकृत्य दास्यामि फाल्गुनार्थे महीपते ॥  
एष चापि नरव्याधो मत्कृते जीवितं त्यजेत् ।

(Bhishma, 107, 28 to 33)

५. अस्त्रं चतुर्विधं वीरे यस्मिन्नासीत् प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ (Drona, 9-7)

६. वर्णश्रेष्ठ्यात् कुलोत्पत्त्या श्रुतेन वयसा धिया ।  
वीर्यात् दाक्ष्यात् अधृष्यत्वात् अर्थज्ञानात् नयात् जयात् ॥

७. तपसा च कृतज्ञत्वात् वृद्धः सर्वगुणैरपि ॥ (Drona 6- 2,3)

८. वयसाशीतिपञ्चकः । (Drona, 192-64)

९. जिह्लाग्रे चतुरो वेदाः कराग्रे सशरं धनुः ।  
उभयोः द्रोणसामर्थ्यं शापादपि शरादपि ॥

(Virata, 5 1-10 Kumbhakonam Edn. only)

१०. विदितं चापलं ह्यासीत् आत्मजस्य दुरात्मनः ॥ (Sowptika, 12-7)

११. परमाद्गदतेनापि न स्म तात त्वया रणे ।  
इदमस्त्रं प्रयोक्तव्यं मानुषेषु विशेषतः ॥  
न त्वं जातु सतां मार्गे स्थाता... ॥ (Ibid Verses, 8,9)

१३ (See the same chapter, verses 11 to 24. Sri Krishna  
Condemns him as संरंभी, दुरात्मा, चपलः, क्रूरः etc  
(verses 41); i.e. one itching for war, wicked-souled,  
mischievous, cruel, etc.

१३. Srimad Bhagavatham I-7-42 to 44

१४. आसीद् गाङ्गइवावर्तः मुहूर्तमुदधाविव (Drona, 36-13)

१५. Dharmaraja to Abhimanyu :  
चक्रव्यूहस्य न वयं विद्मो भेदं कथंचन ।  
त्वं वार्जुनो वा कृष्णो वा भिद्यात् प्रद्युम्न एव वा ॥  
चक्रव्यूहं महाबाहो पञ्चमो नोपपद्यते ॥ (Drona, 35-15)
१६. Drona parvan, 37-5
१७. तमाचार्योऽब्रवीद् कर्णं शनकैः प्रहसन्निव ।  
अभेद्यकवचः श्रीमान् युवाचाशु पराक्रमः ॥  
उपदिष्टा मया चास्य पितुः कवच धारणा ।  
तामेष निखिलां वेत्ति ध्रुवं परपुरंजयः ॥  
शक्यं त्वस्य धनुश्चेतुं ज्यां च बाणैः समाहितैः ।  
अभीषुंश्च हयांश्चैव तथोभौ पाष्णिसारथी ॥  
एतत् कुरु महेश्वास राधेय यदि शक्यते ।  
अथैनं विमुखीकृत्य पश्चात् प्रहरणं कुरु ॥ (Drona 48-26 to 29)
१८. अन्तरिक्षे च भूतानि प्राक्रोशान्त विशाम्पते ।  
दृष्ट्वा निपतितं वीरं च्युतं चन्द्रमिवाम्बरात् ॥  
द्रोणकर्णमुखैः षड्भिः धार्तराष्ट्रैर्महारथैः ।  
एकोऽयं निहतः शेते नैष धर्मो मतो हि नः ॥ (Drona 49-21,27)
१९. आस्थीयतां जये योगो. धर्ममुत्सृज्य पाण्डवा : ॥ (Drona,190-40)  
अनृतं जीवितस्यार्थं वदन्न स्पृशतेऽनृतैः
२०. अधर्मतः कृतं युद्धं समयो निधनस्य ते ॥ (Ibid verse 35)
२१. यदि नाम न युध्येरन् शिक्षिता ब्रह्मबन्धवः ।  
स्वकर्मभिरसन्तुष्टा न स्म क्षत्रं क्षयं व्रजेत् ॥  
अहिंसां सर्वभूतेषु धर्मं ज्यायस्तरं विदुः ।  
तस्य च ब्राह्मणो मूलं भवांश्च ब्रह्मवित्तमः ॥  
श्वपाकवन्लेच्छगणान् हत्वा चान्यान् पृथग्विधान् ।  
अज्ञानान्मूढवत् ब्रह्मन् पुत्रदारधनेप्सया ॥  
एकस्यार्थं बहून्हत्वा पुत्रस्याधर्मविधया ।  
स्वकर्मस्थान् विकर्मस्थः न व्यपत्रपसे कथं ? ॥ (Drona, 146-68)

२२. ततोऽसृजत् तमः कृष्णः सूर्यस्यावरणं प्रति ।  
योगी योगेन संयुक्तः योगिनामीश्वरो हरिः ॥
२३. ध्यायन् महोपनिषदं योगयुक्तोऽभवन्मुनिः । (Drona, 143-35)
२४. ये लोकाः मम विमलाः सकृत् विभाताः  
ब्रह्माद्यैः सुरवृषभैरपीष्यमाणाः ।  
तान् क्षिप्रं ब्रज सतताग्निहोत्रयाजिन् !  
मत्तुल्यो भव गरुडोत्तमाङ्गयानः ॥ (Drama 143-48)  
Compare Ramayana :  
मया त्वं समनुज्ञातः गच्छ लोकाननुत्तमान्” etc  
(Sri Rama to Jatayu)
२५. Karna's words :  
एको भर्ता स्त्रिया देवैर्विहितः कुरुनन्दन ।  
इयं त्वनेकवशगा बन्धकीति विनिश्चिता ॥  
अस्याः सभानयनं न चित्रमिति मे मतिः ।  
एकाम्बरघरत्वं वाप्यथ वापि विवस्त्रता ॥ etc (Sabha, 68-35,36)
२६. Virata Parvan, Ch.47 and 48
२७. Udyoga Parvan, Ch. 141, verse 2-onwards
२८. प्राप्य चापि महद्राज्यं तदहं मधुसूदन ।  
स्फीतं दुर्योधनायैव सम्प्रदधामरिन्दम ॥
२९. Karna parvan 91 - 1 to 14.
३०. धर्मप्रधानं किल पाति धर्म  
इत्यब्रुवन धर्मविदः सदैव ।  
वयं च धर्मे प्रयताम नित्यं  
चर्तुं यथाशक्ति यथाश्रुतं च ॥  
स चापि निघ्राति न पाति भक्तान्  
मन्ये न नित्यं परिपाति धर्मः ॥ (Karna 90-86)

३१. अमोघः परमास्त्रस्य पातस्तत्य भविष्यति ।

स तु गर्भो मृतो जातो दीर्घमायुरवाप्स्यति ॥

त्वां तु कापुरुषं पापं विदुः सर्वे मनीषिणः ।

asok 16-8 असकृत्पापकर्माणं बालजीवितघातकम् ॥

तस्मात् त्वमस्य पापस्य कर्मणः फलमान्पुहि ।

16-9 त्रीणि वर्षसहस्राणि चरिष्यसि महीमिमां ।

16-10 अप्रान्पुवन् क्वचित् कश्चित् संविदं जातु केनचित् ॥

16-11 निर्जनानसहायस्त्वं देशान् प्रविचरिष्यसि ॥

16-12 भवित्री न हि ते क्षुद्रं जनमध्येषु संस्थितिः ।

पूयशोणितगन्धी च दुर्गकान्तार संश्रयः ॥

16-13 विचरिष्यसि पापात्मन् सर्वव्याधिसमन्वितः ॥

(Souptika, 16-8 to 12)



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## Lecture 5

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# Shri Krishna as Man and God

We have tried to analyse the personality of Sri Krishna and his role in the Mahabharata as that of a rare man so far, to the extent possible, on human terms and motives and explanations without much consideration for the miracles and the supernatural episodes.

This is indeed a kind of rope walking and this assumption does not do full justice to the Epic as a whole, nor can it explain every detail in it, nor the totality of Veda Vyasa's vision. For, the Epic is no mere history in the Western, Indological sense, nor is it a mere poem of human love or adventure or war as most westerners consider. It is a story in human terms mainly, no doubt, but with Divine motives and overtones and undertones of value and vision. That is our Indian sense of 'Itihasa'. People who have struggled to read it through as a mere human tale of bygone days have been obliged either to overlook theological and philosophical parts in it or treat them as interpolations, or in short, treat them as 'non-sense,' though it is this 'non-sense' that Indian tradition has always valued and treasured as more important than the mere skeleton of the story, all along, all through the centuries. To reject these parts outright as 'senseless' overadditions by a later generation has proved injurious to the very text and texture of the work, as these 'senseless' parts have been so organic to the composition of the poem and so very essential to the very mould and cast of the poem that anyone who rejects them or ignores them would be left only with a ridiculous, meaningless, disjointed or truncated parody of the original work as conceived and drawn up by Veda Vyasa.

The late Dr. V.S. Sukthankar who attempted to dislodge one such 'nucleus' of the original, and on Western and West-inspired Indian assumptions, in terms of a twentyfour thousand verse-text has this to say finally, on the day of his last lecture and death at Elphinstone college:

"Higher criticism would have us search for the lost, 'epic nucleus', which is apparently something immensely worth possessing. With that end in view it proceeds by the method of athetizing certain lines, passages, chapters or even whole books. These are spurious and all the rest is the work of one poet . . . Very little reflection is needed to convince one that a mere process of skipping of what we regard as spurious will not automatically leave us with the pure and unalloyed 'original.' (Not one 'source' but many.) . . . On the other hand we have got the poem, about which there is no doubt, and we may be able to puzzle out a good deal about its meaning, its inner meaning, if we tried. Let us then focus our thoughts upon that and try to understand it as best we can. I believe we shall find in the poem itself something far greater and nobler than the lost paradise of the primitive Kshatriya tale of love and war, for which the Western Savants have been vainly searching and which the Indian people had long outgrown and discarded."

Whatever edition of the Mahabharatha we make a study of, does have spiritual and philosophical overtones as an allegory, whose meanings colour every character of the poem including that of Sri Krishna. For, that was how Veda Vyasa 'saw' them, characters, incidents, their sequence and total meaning. This does not mean that the story does not have a continuous meaning on the human plane of happenings; it **does** have a profound and complex meaning in social, political, ethical and psychological terms for man, about his well-being individually as well as collectively; and this is what we have tried to present so far in a sum up; but our submission is that this is not all that there is in the work; there is something more; and that is the topic of this fifth and final lecture. In short, we have seen Shri Krishna as man so far; we shall see him as God hereafter and try to grasp Veda Vyasa's fuller vision.

## **The Concept of Avathar**

One of the foundational concepts of our Hindu way of life as enshrined in the Vedas is that God is not a mute or indifferent witness to the movement of world history and that he Incarnates Himself in various Divine Embodiments at appropriate moments to turn the course of that history into auspicious evolution, and to avert calamities to Dharma and those that follow it. There is no significance for world history

without God in terms of purpose or direction. Veda Vyasa himself was one such avatar, and he classified the mass of Vedic verses lying in disorder and disuse into the now well known four collections, saving them from confusion and being thrown into oblivion. He was not unaware of this great idea lying through the Vedas as a thread and accounting for the various exploits of God as Trivikrama conquering all the worlds with his magnificent Three Feet, as a friend of Indra, constantly assisting him in all his justified and crucial struggles with demoniac forces like those of Vritra, Namuchi, Shambara, Vala and others, and so on, in hundreds of myths running through all the Vedas from Rigveda to Atharva, in their numerous Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas. In fact it was to set the Vedic message and vision more clearly and attractively for the common man and woman to catch, understand and enjoy that Veda Vyasa used the contemporaneous story as an excuse and allegory, which is why it has come to be known as the Fifth Veda. This may not be the Western view, but what do we have to care for an ignorant view that belittles this grand structure of meanings in the Vedic background, which our wise tradition has painstakingly identified and treasured all through the ages? Our Hindu sense of history is not that of a catalogue of isolated incidents of mankind confined to social or political phenomena. Spiritual phenomena too have a history and they are as much part of it as any other phenomenon! In fact, in the final analysis, all history is basically spiritual only, whether one understands it or no! That is our Hindu outlook of life - that all life is an eternal war between good and evil forces, and that final victory is only for the good ones. But until that final moment arrives, good forces have testing times, they undergo betrayals and humiliations, and it is only through ordeals that they can vindicate their goodness. Good forces are often defeated in a show of might with evil ones, but a battle or two lost do not seal the fate of the whole drawn up war in favour of Evil! Man must cooperate on the side of good forces for his own well-being, and there is no neutrality in this ceaseless war of great consequences. That is the spiritual truth and warning running through the world's history, for a student of the Vedas. There is neither evolution nor optimism possible for a student of history without this value scale, and it is ridiculous not to accept it, while we admit of similar scales in biology and natural sciences! We have no right to

talk of evolution or devolution except in terms of values, ethical, social or spiritual. History in order to be history has to be world events viewed from some definite human angle of vision; for history without human interpretation is unknown to man and is an impossibility, as it would degenerate into incoherent, disjointed list of events without significance. The very word 'significance' involves human values! Those that suffer from untenable and impracticable notions of "purely objective history" on "scientific" basis have yet to write one such, and prove its usefulness to man. If you abolish spiritual angles, you will have to use economic, political and other such less significant narrower angles which will result in the kinds of history known to us so far, especially from the West. You will never have history without human angle. So why not adopt the broadest of these angles and see whether all other planes of meaning of history can also yield tangible results in a unified whole structure of meaning? That is our sense of history, and it involves God.

One of the boldest statements of this view is to be seen in Bhagavad Gita, chapter 4:

"Though I am without birth (in the human sense), and not subject to deformity and death (like human beings) and though I am the Overlord of all Beings, I resort to my own Divine Nature and incarnate myself (in various forms) under my own free will (unlike humans under the force of their Karma.)"

"Whenever there is a clouding of the brightness of Dharma the Cosmic Law, and whenever evil or adharma props up its ugly head, then surely do I incarnate myself."

"It is to ensure protection to the Righteous, and punishment to the Evil-doers, and to re-establish Dharma, that I reincarnate again and again in all ages and epochs."

"He who knows in truth this secret of my Incarnations and my Divine Activities in them, in this manner, shall not attain any more bondage in further Karmic bodies, after leaving his present body, Oh Arjuna."<sup>2</sup>

There is an order and propriety in this table of contents about Divine Incarnations, that deserves to be pointed out. The speaker is Bhagavan Sri Krishna himself as God and the finality of the view presented herein is unquestionable.

1. In the first of these immortal verses is stated how God incarnates himself: that the human process of embodiment and disembodiment is to be thoroughly discriminated from the Divine Process of Incarnation - that in fact is how Arjuna subject to the force of Cyclic embodiments under the law of Karma, the influence of Prakriti or matter with its triple qualities of **sattva, rajas and tamas**, which is also why he cannot remember how many times he is already so embodied and in what bodies so far; whereas Sri Krishna who is God Incarnate comes down not under any external pressure superior to him by force, but under His own sweet free will, and takes on Divine Bodies not subject to ignorance, death, injuries, fatigue and other human physical limitations. That is the mystery of the Avatar! God is beyond birth and death; yet He comes down in human and sub human forms out of His infinite mercy, which is the very heart of this mystery. He may choose to be the son of Vasudeva and Devaki or of any other parents at any historical moment of human affairs requiring Him in that role, and yet He is more than that. He is the Immortal Divine Director of cosmic affairs, also participating as a small factor among many others, for His sport, and such of His roles are too many to be counted, and He and He alone knows them all exhaustively. God the transcendent also as the immanent is a paradox which our limited human intellect cannot grasp, except out of deep and steadfast devotion unto Him. God as the cooperative factor of life's evolutionary process, God as a historical participant in it, cannot be easily understood in philosophical systems that keep Him out of it by definition as Absolute and nonrelated, and treat life as unreal and irrelevant to that Absolute. If life is irrelevant to the Absolute, then that Absolute will be equally irrelevant to life, if not more, and it would be absurd to talk of Avatars, God's mercy, life's evolutionary purpose, or even its reality, and therefore of history and such other dear topics in such a philosophical outlook. No Vaishnava philosophy of any school has ever accepted this view, and the Mahabharatha which is a great Vaishnava Epic naturally has no place for it anywhere. The dictum of Purusha Sukta of Rig veda - **ajaya mano bahudha vijayate** - that although really beyond the pangs of birth and death, God does incarnate Himself in innumerable forms of embodiment, is the very crux of the Avatara principle. This must be understood without prejudice to the Reality of

God the Brahman or of life and its process, at the same time. An avatar is neither man elevated to a superhuman height by extraordinary performance or by exaggeration, nor is it God under the illusions of human limitations. The first of these views would deny God in the final analysis and lead to everyman's elevation as God hypothetically which is unabashed human worship based on atheism, and the second leads back to the view of world-illusion, denial of values and hypocrisy in unavoidable contradictions in life and thought at every step in every moment. Even etymologically 'avatar' means 'coming down,' while the term for any man's 'going-up' or deification is 'uddhar'. We are dealing here with the former concept and not the second, we must remember.

2. The second of these verses declares when God assumes those Avatars. The crisis in Dharma at any time would bring Him down, as it is His concern to uphold it.

3. The third verse sets out in order that the first of the purposes is to extend protection to the 'Sadhus.' They are the dear devotees of God who have surrendered their everything to Him, and feel fulfilment only in remembering Him, His various exploits, leelas, in His numerous avatars, and His Divine traits. They are not merely ethically righteous, but spiritually excellent, and devotionally inseparable from Him, and live only on His vision. Such are Akrura, Kuchela, Draupadi, Vidura, in this Avatar, dear to Him, and people like Vibhishana, Hanuman, Lakshmana, Mandodari, Sabari and others in Ramavathar, and in others, souls like Prahlada, Gajendra, Kaliya, Ambarisha and others. It is to be noted that the primary purpose of Avatara is to bless such, that they but live on an actual and continual vision of God and as they are not satisfied with hallucinations of that type. The destruction of the evil doers can be achieved by a mere willing of such, even from a distance, from the other world of eternity. There is no need to 'come down' for this mere trifle. The really difficult and important aspect of Dharma-Samsthapana is the preservation of the spiritually, ethically excellent persons and beings, and not the mere elimination of those others who obstruct this.

4. The fourth verse emphasises that there is a great Vedanthic truth enshrined in this grand statement, the realisation of which is difficult, but which certainly leads to spiritual salvation, once realised.

Sri Krishnavatara is a fine and full instance of this statement by God Himself. Anyone who takes the Bhagavadgita seriously will never dispute Sri Krishna as an avatar of God. There are also numerous other statements by eminent devotees and seers in the Mahabharatha to this effect. We can see some notable and brilliant examples for this.

## Evidences in the Epic

1. It is Bhishma who declares the truth of Sri Krishnavatara in that important episode at the end of which Sishupala is killed by Sri Krishna. Sishupala questioned the Divinity of Sri Krishna as God, and belittled him as but man and cowherd not deserving the Agrapuja that was offered to him at the end of Rajasuya. Bhishma justifies that puja and comes out with one of the grandest and boldest statements about the Avatara principle:

“Sri Krishna deserves worship not only by us as the most worshipful, but by all the three worlds... I have sat at the feet of many wise men ripe in knowledge, and have heard of great virtues of Sri Krishna as sung by them as his praise... You, assembled warriors! You all deserve to stand witness to this worship of Sri Krishna who is endowed with all fine virtues; of Sri Krishna who is the teacher, preceptor and father of all the worlds; a worship bestowed on one who deserves it richly.... Sri Krishna is verily the source of origin and dissolution of all the worlds. The whole world of moveables and immoveables exists for his sake only. He is Narayana the most ancient God of yore, with a thousand faces, mouths etc., who created all this out of Primeval Waters. When all this is dissolved, He alone remains undeformed, as the All Soul, this God Narayana ...”<sup>3</sup>

2. Draupadi illustrates this identity between Sri Krishna and Sriman Narayana, the Supreme God of gods, in her most difficult of moments, of humiliation in the Kaurava assembly, by calling for help and uttering His divine Names as ‘Govinda’ and ‘Hari’. She recalled this identity as taught to her by Vasistha.<sup>4</sup>

3. Markandeya, the Immortal sage who says that he could actually see God as Narayana at the previous Great Deluge, when all created worlds were submerged in Waters, as sleeping like a child on a banyan leaf, who is the same as this Sri Krishna, the dear friend of the Pandavas, and as such He is the fittest refuge of the Pandavas, now in so much suffering.<sup>5</sup>

4. Kunti, the much suffered mother of the Pandavas, recollects what a divine voice in the air had uttered at Arujuna's birth: that this son of hers would conquer the worlds, and have his fame spread to the heavens, after eliminating the Kauravas, and attaining the ancient empire. She now prays to Sri Krishna, identifying him as God the great support of Dharma, of Creatures, and prays for support and help, as He alone can grant it to her, being the supreme Brahman in whom all is established.<sup>6</sup>

5. Sri Krishna himself reveals this truth in his Cosmic Form to Dhritarashtra and his assembly when an attempt is made to arrest him, when his peace-mission fails. He reveals all the Pandavas, Yadavas, Adityas, Rudras, Vasus and other gods in His Cosmic Body, just as in the well known Visvarupa Chapter in the Gita.<sup>7</sup>

6. In the Shanti Parva there are numerous identifications of Sri Krishna as God Narayana, the Supreme Brahman, and particularly so in the Mokshadharma part of it. There is a description of all the major ten avatars in it, and an elaboration of Sri Krishnavatar in particular. Students of Indian thought and Vedantic Theology prize this part as invaluable. There are also revelations by God Himself to this effect, about the truth and purpose of avatars, to sages like Narada and others, more than once.<sup>8</sup>

7. To crown this all here is what Veda Vyasa confides to Arjuna:

"He who guides your chariot is the four armed, ancient seer, Vasudeva, holding the Discus, the Mace and other Divine weapons. He does this prompted by His great love for you, and to relieve the great weight from which the earth is suffering. Having attained His goal, this long-eyed one, He has attained His original place...."<sup>9</sup>

Vyasa says this to a mourning Arjuna, bereaved of Sri Krishna, at the end of the total self-destruction of the Yadavas.

8. See this episode of Sri Krishna's disappearance from this earth as a final instance of this truth. After Balarama sits in the posture of Yoga and breathes out his last breath, a white and supernatural serpent emanates from his mouth and departs to Heavens, indicating that the light within was that of



Adishesha. Sri Krishna then moves about the forests in a mood of utter desolation and then sits at a spot in a posture of Yoga Samadhi. Bhagavan Vyasa Comments:

"Although the Supreme Brahman, He desired to have a pretext for throwing off this body, as He knew all the essence of Shastras. Then He lay Himself down, after controlling all the senses, speech and mind, in a mood of Mahayoga samadhi. Then a hunter by name Jara came there, desirous of obtaining some prey for his hunting. He shot an arrow at Sri Krishna's foot, (mistaking it for a bird) and then neared Him. He saw Him dressed in yellow silks, and possessed of many arms. Then he realised his mistake and fell at His feet... Oh king, listen. The Supreme Lord, Bhagavan Narayana of such lustre that no human eyes could endure, who is the beginning and the end of this world, Lord of Yogas, Then pervaded the skies, with his Divine Excellence, and then attained back His Immeasurable place beyond human mind and words."<sup>10</sup>

There would be no need to quote more instances when we thus realise the very tone and tenor of the Epic, as meant to justify one of the earliest statements of Vyasa that the primary purpose of the Epic (among others) is to justify the greatness of Sri Krishna - Vasudevasya Mahatmayam - as an Avatara of God.

## Divine Miracles

We have said that though the Epic is eminently readable, understandable and enjoyable on the human plane, and makes much meaning in terms of social, ethical, political values, this is not all the meaning of the Epic!

Nor is the story entirely meaningful within the human circle, without significant breaks in terms of spiritual or Divine Miracles, due to the intervention of Sri Krishna, at crucial turns of the story! If we leave these, it would result in unbridgeable gaps that would leave the story mutilated detrimentally to its total meaning. The Divinity of Sri Krishnavatar is the only explanation that could fill these numerous gaps and supply its due meaning.

Take Draupadi's humiliation as the first of these, for example. Without Sri Krishna's divine intervention Draupadi might have been left entirely denuded in that assembly of

brutes. If you do not believe that help came to her by a miraculous source, you have no alternative to that situation. But the Epic says that she was saved, after testing her unflinching faith in Him, and in response to her self-surrender.

What then is the significance of the Epic on the spiritual plane, from this angle, involving this situation, symbolically?

This is what elders say: Draupady stands for the Individual Soul - Jivatman - wedded to Five Breaths or Senses, the Five Brothers, the Pandavas. Just as Draupadi is not human born, the soul also is not made of material matter. She is betrayed by her very five breaths, or the Five senses (Indriyas). It is only God that can save it and liberate it. But it is locked in a mortal body which is ruled over by a blind Ego the king Dhritarashtra, symbolising it. Gandhari symbolises malice, his counterpart, voluntarily closing her eyes to the goodness of the others and the beauty of this God-made world. Duryodhana, their first offspring stands for Greed and lust, Dussasana for insatiable vulgar desires; Karna for infatuation, Shakuni for hypocrisy and incitement.

The hundred children of the Blind forces stand obviously for numerous other forms of ignorance, forces of bondage and nescience.

Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and other neutral persons stand for the valour, prowess, learning, ability of the Jivatman, which however desert him and join his enemies, in a volteface, in the last minute, in a grand and teacherous betrayal.

Vidura stands for wisdom which, forces of betrayal actually ridicule and do not obey. Thus it becomes ineffectual and incapable of saving the individual soul.

The Jivatman deserves it in a way, as he has forgotten God in prosperity signified by the post Rajasuya rule, and the gamble that follows it. It is staked by the evil forces for their self-gratification, a right that they do not have actually, but misappropriate for themselves, taking disadvantage of its helpless situation.

But the error is realised and surrender to God performed in the nick of time. But God who saves ultimately, does examine the steadfastness of the soul in Dharma. This examination is

the meaning elaborated in the Vana Parvan and Virata Parvan. The examination of the Pandavas by Durvas, of Arjuna by Siva, by Urvashi and Indra, of Yudhishtira by Yama and so on signifies the open tests. The incongnito period of travails, humiliation by Kichaka and other insults pocketed, illustrate a more difficult stage of this test.

' Then starts God's Effort! - ut - Yoga God is signified by the syllable 'ut' (in the Upanishads), and His efforts are what are going to save the Individual soul hereafter, when ' all self-efforts of the soul are of no use.

God, first advises the evil forces to listen to sense, and come for a compromise, But when they do not listen, Himself wages a war against them, by aligning all remnants of good forces in the human personality on one side, and the others opposite Him, and by Himself leading those good forces, infusing them with wisdom and courage in their moments of crisis, and by using extraordinary powers to vanquish the evil forces, and to crown Goodness on the heart-throne of the human personality. The rule of the right signifies the order of life as envisaged by God. Such is the spiritual meaning of the story in a nutshell. The other details can be filled up parallelly, on close thinking.

How could all this be possible without the instrumentality of Sri Krishna as God?

So also on the human plane the Pandavas are no more than non-entities without Sri Krishna's active support to them and involvement in the story at every crucial turn in it. Had it not been for his suggestion that Yudhishtira should meet Bhishma on the ninth night of the War, where would they be? Had it not been for His numerous strategems against Drona and Karna, what would have happened? But for Him even Parikshit might have been dead, and Aswatthama not punished.

We have explained even these interferences on the human plane with whatever political, ethical justifications we can offer. But philosophically and spiritually it is God that requires to be vindicated or justified in His onslaught against evil, ceaselessly. A more detailed, and unconcealed spiritual explanation would result in an essay on God's role in the combat between good and evil, and that is

what Vedantins are interested in, in support of positions in Brahmasutra, the Upanishads and the Gita. God is the Supreme Eater, (atta charachara grahanat) the Appropriater, that digests both good and evil for His purposes, to make new orders emerge out of present chaos. Politically and ethically too, Sri Krishna was wedded to the goal of establishing a new order of peace, justice, value and prosperity to mankind. Every deed by him is only towards this end in the Epic.

God the transcendent of the Veda, is also God, Sri Krishna, the friend, philosopher and guide of Arjuna here, as the Immanent, the Accessible, the Incarnate. He is Indrasya Yujuh Sakha - the ever loving, ever available friend of Indra in the Veda. Here in the Epic He is the friend of Indra's Son Arjuna. Such correspondence fully developed will amply justify the Mahabharatha as the Fifth Veda.

## CONCLUSION

The five topics chosen for analysis in these lectures are but introductory to the ocean of Veda Vyasa's wisdom. For, who can really delve deep into it fully to gather all the pearls in it?

May Lord Sri Krishna, and Bhagavan Veda Vyasa be pleased with this token service by one who is captivated by the beauties of the Divine Epic, and its endless overtones and undertones of multiple meanings, that are always relevant to life.

May God bestow all His special Grace on the organisers of these lectures and initiate them into ever more beneficial activities to Humanity and to God, thereby. OM Tat SAT

## Chapter 5

१. Dr. V.S.Sukhtankar in : On the meaning of the Mahabharatha pp30-31

२. Bhagavad Gita, Ch.4 verses 6-9

३. न हि केवलमस्माकं अयमर्च्यतमोऽच्युतः ।  
त्रयाणामपि लोकानां अर्चनीयो महाभुजः ॥  
ज्ञानवृद्धा मया राजन् बहवः पर्युपासिताः ।  
तेषां कथयतां शौरेः अहं गुणवतो गुणान् ॥  
समागतानामश्रौषं बहून् बहुमतान् सतां ॥  
तमिमं गुणसंपन्नं आचार्यं पितरं गुरुं ।  
अर्च्यमर्चितमर्चाहं सर्वे संक्षन्तुमर्हथ ॥  
कृष्ण एव हि लोकानां उत्पत्तिरपि चाप्ययः ।  
कृष्णस्य हि कृते विश्वं इदं भूतं चराचरम् ॥  
पुरा नारायणो देवः स्वयम्भूः प्रपितामहः ।  
सहस्रशीर्षः पुरुषो ध्रुवोऽव्यक्तः सनातनः ॥  
आभूतसम्लवे प्राप्ते प्रलीने प्रकृतौ महान् ।  
एकस्तिष्ठति सर्वात्मा स तु नारायणः प्रभुः ॥

(Sabha, 38, verses 9 to 35)

४. ज्ञातं मया वसिष्ठेन पुरा गीतं महात्मना ।  
महत्यापदि सम्प्राप्ते स्मर्तव्यो भगवान् हरिः ॥  
गोविन्देति समाभाष्य कृष्णेतिच पुनः पुनः ।  
मनसा चिन्तयामास देवं नारायणं प्रभुम् ।  
आपत्त्वभयदं कृष्णं लोकानां प्रपितामहं ।  
गोविन्द द्वारकावासिन् ! कृष्ण ! गोपीजनप्रिय ।  
कौरवैः परिभूतां मां किं न जानासि केशव ॥ (Sabha 68, 41-44)

५. यः स देवो मया दृष्टः पुरा पद्मायतेक्षणः ।  
स एष पुरुषव्याघ्रः सम्बन्धी ते जनार्दनः ॥  
अस्यैव वरदानाद्धि स्मृतिर्न प्रजहाति माम् ।  
दीर्घमायुश्च कौन्तेय स्वच्छन्दमरणं मम ॥

स एष कृष्णो वाष्ण्यः पुराणपुरुषो विभुः ।  
 आस्ते हररिरचिन्त्यात्मा क्रीडन्निव महाभुजः ॥  
 एष धाता विधाता च संहर्ता चैवचाग्रतः ।  
 श्रीवत्सवक्षा गोविन्दः प्रजापतिपतिः प्रभुः ॥  
 दृष्ट्वेमं वृष्णिप्रवरं स्मृतिर्माभियमागता ।  
 आदिदेवमयं जिष्णुं पुरुषं पीतवाससम् ॥  
 सर्वेषामेव भूतानां पिता माता च माधवः ।  
 गच्छध्वमेनं शरणं शरण्यं कौरवर्षभाः ॥ (Vana, 189, 52-58)

६. कृष्णाय महते नित्यं धर्मो धारयति प्रजाः ।  
 प्रभावज्ञास्मि ते कृष्ण सत्यस्याभिजनस्य च ।  
 त्वमेव नः कुले धर्मः त्वं सत्यं त्वं तपो महत् ॥  
 त्वं त्राता त्वं महत् ब्रह्म त्वयि सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ (Udyoga 90-67  
 & 102-104)

७. Udyoga, Chapter 131

८. See in particular Ch.341, verses under 'Sri Bhagavanucha' which look like annotations of Gita verses.

९. रथस्य पुरतो याति यः स चक्रगदाधरः ।  
 तव स्नेहात् पुराणार्षिः वासुदेवश्चतुर्भुजः ॥  
 कृत्वा भारावतरणं पृथिव्याः पृथुलोचनः ।  
 मोक्षयित्वा तनुं प्राप्तः कृष्णः स्वस्थानमुत्तमम् ॥  
 (Mausala, 18-29-30)

१०. देवोऽपि सन् देहविमोक्षहेतोः  
 निमित्तमैच्छत् सकलार्थतत्त्ववित् ।  
 स संनिरुध्येन्द्रियवाङ्मनास्तु  
 शिष्ये महायोगमुपेत्य कृष्णः ॥  
 जराथ तं देशमुपाजगाम  
 लुब्धस्तदानीं मृगलिप्सुरुग्रः ।  
 स केशवं योगयुक्तं शयानं ।  
 मृगासत्को लुब्धकः सायकेन ॥

जराविध्यत् पादतले त्वरावान्  
तं चाभितस्तत् जिघृक्षुर्जगाम ।  
अथापश्यत् पुरुषं योगयुक्तं  
पीताम्बरं लुब्धकोऽनेकबाहुं ॥  
ततो राजन् भगवानुग्रतेजाः  
नारायणः प्रभवश्चाप्ययश्च ।  
योगाचार्यो रोदसी व्याप्य लक्ष्म्या  
स्थानं प्राप स्वं महात्माप्रमेयम् ॥ (Mausala  
वासुदेवस्य माहात्म्यं

99 Adi I-100. वासुदेवस्य माहात्म्य etc

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## **Krishna : The warrior and The Mystic**

“Krishna, we are told, was both a warrior and a mystic. As a mystic, we know from the Mahabharat and from other Puranas how Krishna had meditated long in the Gandha-Madan forest, on the Puskara lake, and on the Badri Mountain. This aspect of Krishna’s mystical achievement has not been noticed by many, because like La Place in his famous reply to Napoleon “they have not felt the necessity for the hypothesis.” It was due to the spiritual power that Krishna gathered in his meditations at these three places of natural scenery, a forest, a lake and a mountain, devoted himself to God, and having ultimately succeeded in realising him, that he became later on what the Gita calls Yogeshwara and as Yogeshwara he was responsible for the victory of the Pandavas. It is due to the spiritual power which a man gets through his meditation that he is enabled to spread the spiritual influence far and wide. It was thus, therefore, that the presence of Krishna himself even though he acted merely as a charioteer, was responsible for securing victory to Arjuna and the Pandavas in their war with the Kauravas.”

**R.D. Ranade**  
(The Bhagavadgita as a Philosophy of  
God-realisation)

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## PREFACE

I am glad to subscribe this brief preface to the scholarly treatise, 'The role of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata' by Prof. K. S. Narayanacharya. This volume contains the text of the five lectures delivered on the subject by the learned Professor at the Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Gurudev Ranade Mandir, Belgaum. It is very nice of the Academy to publish these lectures in a book form for the benefit of students and scholars interested in the subject and we must be highly grateful to the Academy for this.

Prof. Narayanacharya is one of the most eminent scholars of our country and needs no introduction. He is well known for his vast erudition and spiritual insight. He is a thinker in the real sense and many of his interpretations are most revealing. He is a prolific writer and a very popular exponent of our spiritual texts. It is indeed fortunate that he has chosen to write on our great epics and Vedic literature. Having a deep understanding of our spiritual and cultural traditions, he has set right many misinterpretations of our sacred texts. We can rely on him as an authentic and faithful interpreter of our great works.

The present volume contains five chapters representing five lectures given by the author. The author refers, in the very beginning, to the various viewpoints of different people about Sri Krishna, and points out rightly, that it is the human aspect of this incarnation that is highlighted in the Mahabharata, though He is undoubtedly revered as God. In the first lecture the role of Sri Krishna as statesman, diplomat and strategist is expounded with profuse references to the various situations in the Mahabharata. The second lecture is solely reserved for depicting Sri Krishna as a peace maker. The author traces the very many references in the Mahabharata, analyses them and makes an assessment on their merits, like a true investigator and comes to undeniable conclusions. The question - 'was Sri Krishna really sincere in his peace making efforts?' — is posed and answered. 'He wanted peace, but was prepared for war, in case those powers did not listen to his advice.' Krishna was a practical minded diplomat and subtleties of his diplomacy are traced according to the epic in a factual and interesting way. Sri Krishna's efforts were not to save Duryodhana, but the rest of the innocent world from the clutches of death. It was his duty