Vaughan Pilikian translates and edits Sanskrit literature full time for the JJC Foundation, co-publishers (with NYU Press) of the Clay Sanskrit Library. The Clay Sanskrit Library is a unique series that, through original text and English translation, gives an international readership access to the beauty and variety of classical Sanskrit literature.

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“Drona,” Book Seven of the Maha·bhárata, is named for the master of the warrior arts whom Duryodhana selects as the latest leader of his forces. The savage poetry and tragic lyricism of volume one culminates with Náráda’s teaching on the origin of Death, following the slaying of Arjuna’s son, Abhimanyu.

Here is a new Clay Sanskrit Library edition and translation of Volume One (of three) of “Drona,” Book Seven of the Maha·bhárata.

The heart of the epic is the eighteen-day battle between the Káuravas and the Pándavas, filling five books. The battle books yield the finest poetry of the Maha·bhárata. “Drona” is itself a vast text, and runs almost to the length of the entire “Iliad.”

Here we join the action during an uneasy hiatus after ten days of fighting. The warring cousins stand face to face on the battlefield, awestruck by the fall of Bhishma. Now it is Drona’s turn to take his place as the leader of Duryodhana’s armies, despite his ongoing personal conflicts as mentor to both the Pándava and Káurava heroes in their youth.

Like all great art, the Maha·bhárata fascinates for reasons we cannot explain. It does not offer simple moral lessons or comforting fables, but depicts, on a canvas broader than any before or since, the fecundity and chaos of human life. We can recognize much here; one might say that the great Indian epic was, and in parts of the world still is, a cinema before electricity.
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THE DEATH OF THE BEHOLDEN
TAD BALAM SUJAMAD DIRNAHI
TVADYAHA PREKSHA VITYAVAH
DADHAHI AIKO RANE PADHTAH
VRASENO STRAYAYAH.
SARDA DAASI DISO MUKTA VRASENENA MARISA
VICERUS TE VINIRBHIDYA NARAYAJIRATHADVIPAH.
TASYA DIPTAH MAHABANAH VINISCERUH SAHASRAH
BHANOR IVA MAHABHOO GRISHMAKALE MARICAYA.
TEN ARDITA MAHARAJA RATHINAH SADINAS TATHA
NIPERUR URVYAM SAHASA VATAINUNNA IVA DRUMAH.

16.5 HAYSURGHANISI CA RATHASURGHANISI CA
GAJASURGHANISI CA SAMANTATAH
APATAYAD RANE, RAJA,
SATA SO 'THA SAHASRAH.

DRSYAA TAM EVAH SAMARE VICARANTAM ABHITAVAT
SAHITAHA SARVVARJANAH PARIVRUVUH SAMANTATAH.
NAKULIS TU SATANIKO VRASENAM SAMABHYAYATH
VIVYADHA C AIMAH DASABHIR NARACAIR MARMABHEDIBHAAH.
TASYA KARNAJATMAJAA CAPEM CHITVAA KETUM APATAYAT
TAM BHRAATARAM PARIPSANTO DRUAPADEYA SAMABHYAYUH.
KARNAJATMAJAA SARVARATAI CAKRUSH C ADHIYAM ANJASA
TAN NADANTO 'BHAYADHAVANTA DROаждPUTRAIMUKHA RATHAH
CHADAYANTO MAHARAJA DRUAPADEYAN MAHARATHAH
SARAIR NANAVIDHAI SURNAM PARVATAJ JALAIYA IVA.
TAN PANDAVAH PRATYAGRHANAM TVARITHA PUTRAGRIHDEHINAH
PANCALAH KEEKAYA MATSYAH SRIJAYA C ODYATAJAYUDHAH.
TAD YUDDHAM ABHAVAD GHAHRAH TUMULAM LOMAHAARSHAANAH
TVADYAIH PANDUPUTRAANAM DEVANAM IVA DANAVAIH.
EVAH UTTAMASAISHRAMBBHA YUYUDHUH KURUJPAANDAVAH

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sândhya spoke.

Great Vrisha-sena watched the broad army of your sons rent open and began all alone to check the Pándavas with his enchanted bow. Arrows flew over the Pándava horde in ten directions and tore through men, chariots, horses and elephants. Like the sun’s rays in the hot season thousands of those burning and heavy shafts from the great man’s hand cut through riders and drivers. And pierced through o great king they fell to their knees, trees buckled in the wind. O majesty there were throngs of chariots and horses and elephants in numbers too large to count which he crushed beneath his might.

When the other kings saw Vrisha-sena careering fearlessly through the fray they came in around him in a circle. Nákula’s boy Shatánika moved in first and struck him with ten razorsharp wroughtiron shafts. But Karna’s son splintered his bow and severed the pole of his standard as the children of Dráupadi closed keenly in around their brother. Soon Vrisha-sena disappeared beneath a thick screen of arrows but then came the warriors under Ashvattháman’s command roaring and wheeling and darkening the skies above the mighty Draupádayas with darts beyond number. They engulfed them as clouds engulf a mountain ridge. Thirsty for Ashvattháman’s blood the Pándavas were upon him in a moment and behind them with weapons held high rode Panchálas, Kékayas, Matsyas, Srínjayas. Loud and bloody and full of horror was the fighting that came next as Pandu’s sons met your own like gods meeting demons. Their wrath was now at its height. Eye to eye the Kurus and Pándavas stood, and sin for sin they fought. Such was their passion.
paraśiparam udiśantaḥ paraśiparaksṭāgasaḥ.
teṣaṁ daḍśīre kopād vapūṣaya amitaśejasāṁ
yuyutsūnāṁ iv ākāśe patatri/varaḥbhogināṁ.

16.15 Bhīma/Karna/Kṛśṇa/Drona/Drauṇi/Pārśuṣa/Satyaśakṁ
babhāse sa raṇaḥ/oddeṣaḥ kalasūtryair ēv/oditaḥ.
tad ēśī tumulaṁ yuddhāṁ nighnatām itar ētaram
mahābalanāṁ balīṣhir dānavānāṁ yathā suraiḥ.
tato Yudhiṣṭhirāṁ/ānikaṁ uddhūte ēṛṇaṇaṁ/sivān
tvadiyam avadhītāṁ sainyaṁ sampradutajmahāratham.

tāt prabhagnāṁ balāṁ dṛṣṭya śatrubhir bhṛṣam arditaṁ,
«alaṁ drutena vaḥ śūrā» ēti Droṇo 'bhyabhāṣaṁ.
tataḥ sōnaḥsayaḥ kruddhaṁ caturdanta ēva dvipaḥ
praviśya Paṇḍavāṁ/ānikaṁ Yudhiṣṭhiram upāđravat.

16.20 tām avidhyac chítair bāṇaṁ kaiśapatrair Yudhiṣṭhirāḥ
tasya Droṇo dhanaṁ chittvā tāṁ drutaṁ samupāḍravat.
cakraṁ/sakṣaḥ Kumāras tu Pāṇcālāṁ/yāśakaraḥ
dadhāra Droṇaṁ/ānyaṁ vel ēva saritāṁ patim.
Droṇoṁ nivāritāṁ dṛṣṭvā Kumāreṇa dvijaṁ/ṛṣabham
sīṁhānādāravo hy ēśī sadhu sadhv ēti bhāṣatām.

Kumāras tu tato Droṇoṁ sāyakena mahājāhave
vivyādi ṛāsi sāmkruddhaṁ sīmavaṣ c ānanda muhuḥ.
sāṃvāya tu raṇe Droṇaḥ Kumāraṁ vai mahābalāh
śārair anēkaśāhāsraiḥ kṛtaḥhasto jitaḥklamah

16.25 taṁ śūram āryaṁ/vratinaṁ astrāṁ/ārthaṁ/kṛtaṁ/siṁharam
ca krakaṁ apāṁḍnāt Kumāraṁ dvijāsattamaḥ.
and so unbound their splendor that it seemed like the warriors’ wounded bodies were themselves hungrily plucking the feathered arrows from the sky. Bhima, Karna, Kripa, Drona, Drauni, Dhrishta-dyumna and Sátyaki: the battlefield shone with them as with suns risen at the end of time.

In the crash of battle the killing went on between the great demonic legions and a host divine, before roaring like a stormy sea Yudhi-shthira’s army battered the front line of Duryódhana’s force. Its champions turned to run.

Drona saw his army gashed by its foe and breaking apart and he called out to his soldiers.

“Heroes! Halt your flight!”

On a horse drenched in blood Drona rode like the four-tusked Airávata into the army of the Pándavas until he reached Yudhi-shthira. As the king’s sharp arrows fletched in vulture feathers slammed into him Drona drove on, then broke Yudhi-shthira’s bow in two and put him to flight. And then as the coast holds back the tide it was Yudhi-shthira’s wheelguard* Kumára who to the glory of the Panchálas managed briefly to block Drona’s progress. A great roar of excitement swelled around him as Kumára braved the brahmin bull and crying out like an enraged beast sent an arrow across the fray and into Drona’s chest. But mighty Drona breathed deep, and with a dense flurry of arrows from his dextrous hand the great twiceborn forced Kumára back. Then despite the wheelguard’s heroism and high vows and brilliance with the bow, the mighty priest crushed him beneath his attack.
sa madhyam prāpya senāyāḥ sarvāḥ paricaran dīṣaḥ
tava sainyasya goptā' āsīd Bhāradvājo ratha'ṛṣabhāḥ.
Śīkhaṇḍinaṁ dvādaśabhīr viṁśatīyā c' Īttamauṣasam
Nakulaṁ pañcabadhir viddhva Sahadevaṁ ca saptabhiḥ
Yuddhiṣṭhiram dvādaśabhīr Draupadeyāṁś tribhis tribhīḥ
Sātyakīm pañcabadhir viddhva Matsyaṁ ca daśabhīḥ śaṅkī
yakṣobhayad raṇe yodhān yathāmukhyān abhidravān
abhyaavartata samprepuḥ Kuntīputram Yuddhiṣṭhiram.

16.30 Yugamaṁḍharas tato, rājan, Bhāradvājaṁ mahāratham
vārayāṁ āsa saṁkrudham vāt'ōdhhutāṁ iv' ārṇavam.
Yuddhiṣṭhiram sa viddhva tu śaṅkī saṁnata'parvabhīḥ
Yugamaṁḍharaṁ ca bhallena rathāniḍād apāharat.
tato Virātāḥ Drupadau Kaikeyāḥ Sātyakīḥ Śibīḥ
Vyāghradattaś ca Pāṇcālyāḥ Simhasenaś ca viṁśāvān
ete c' ānye ca bahavaḥ parśpanto Yuddhiṣṭhiram
āvavrūs tasya panthānaṁ kirantaḥ sāyakān bahūn.
Vyāghradattaś ca Pāṇcālyo Droṇaṁ vīvādhā mārgaṇāiḥ
pañcāṣadbhiḥ śītai, rājaṁs, tata ucckruśūr janāḥ.
tvaritaṁ Simhasenas tu Droṇaṁ viddhva mahāratham
prāhasat sahasā hṛṣṭas trāsayaṇ vai yata'vrataṁ.
tato visphārya nayane dhanurijyām avamṛtya ca
talaśābdaṁ mahat kṛtvā Droṇaṁ taṁ samupādravat.
tatas tu Simhasenaṁ śaṅkī käyāt sākuṇḍalām
Vyāghradattasya c' ākramya bhallābhīyām aharaṇa bali.
tān pramṛṭya śaṅka'vṛatāiḥ Pāṇḍavānāṁ mahārathāṁ
Yuddhiṣṭhirāsamabhyāse tathau mṛṣyur iv' āṇtakaḥ.

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Bharad-vaja’s taurine son was proving your army’s savior. Reaching the center of foe’s troops, he aimed by turns in every direction. Shikhándin he struck with twelve of his arrows then Uttaḿaujas with twenty then Nákula with five and Saha-deva with seven. Twelve more pierced Yudhi-shthira as three hit each of the Draupadéyas and five reached Sátyaki and he struck Masya with ten. He threw the warriors about him into turmoil, all the while making urgently for their leader the son of Kuntí. Great Drona was like a tempest-driven sea, and next it was Yúgan-dhara who stepped into his furious path. Sending his true worked arrows straight at Yudhi-shthira, Drona knocked Yúgan-dhara from the seat of his car with a single spearheaded shaft.

Yudhi-shthira was in danger. Together with their comrades Viráta, Drúpada and the Kaikéyas, Sátyaki, Shibi, the Panchála Vaghrá-datta and hero Sinha-sena scattered Drona’s course with their many missiles and arrows to protect their king from harm. O majesty the Panchála went at Drona with fifty of his biting shafts while his friends spirited Yudhi-shthira away. Sinha-sena found his mark with a speedy shot and burst into excited laughter to have grazed the great ascetic. But mighty Drona plucked the string of his own bow and as it sang in the air his spearlike shafts sheared the bejewelled heads of Vaghrá-datta and Sinha-sena away from their necks. Unceasing he ravaged the paladins of the Pándavas with his volleys and now he stood near Yudhi-shthira’s chariot like Death come to bear him off. O majesty, cries of alarm went up from Yudhi-shthira’s troops. With stern vowed Drona so close to him the warriors all thought their king dead. As he reared up to Yudhi-shthira they said...
tato ‘bhanam mahāśabdo rājan Yaudhiśthire bale
hiro rāj’ ēti yodhānaṁ samipāṅsthē yatai-vrata.

abhuvan sainikās tatra dṛṣṭvā Dronasya vikramam,
adya rājā Dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ kṛtārtho vai bhavisyati
āgamiṣyati no nūnaṁ Dhārtarāṣṭrasya samyuge.

evaṁ sanjalapatāṁ teṣāṁ tāvakānāṁ mahārathaḥ
āyā vajena Kaunteyo rathāgoṣṭha nādayan
śoṇiḥ’ōdāṁ rath’āvartāṁ kṛtvā viśāsane nādīm
śūr’āśṭhiçayasaṃkīrṇāṁ pretaçkul’āpahārīṇāṁ
tāṁ śar’āugha-mahāpheyam prāṣaṁṣayasaṃkukālam
nādīm uttīrya vegenā Kurūṁ vidrāvyā Pāṇḍavaḥ
tataḥ Kīrīṭī sahasā Dron’āṇikām upādravaṭ
chādayann iṣuṣālana mahāti mohayann īva.

śīghram abhyasyato bāṇāṁ saṃdāhānasaya c’ āniśaṁ
n’āntaraṁ dadṛśe kaś cīt Kaunteyaṁya yaśasvinah.
na diśo n’āntariṣaṁ ca na dyauro n’āiva ca medinī
dardāya, mahārāja, bāṇāḥbhūtam iv’ abhavat.

n’ādṛṣyata tādā rājaṁs tatra kiṃ cana samyuge
bāṇ’āndhaikalāre mahāti kṛte Gāṇḍīvaṭdhanvanā.
śūrye c’ āstam anupraṭe rājasā c’ abhisamanvete
n’ājñāyatā tādā śatur na suṣṭrī na ca kiṃ cana.

tato ‘vāharaṁ cakrus te Drona’Duryodhan’ādayaḥ.

tān viditvā bhrāṇm trastān ayeudhāmanasaḥ pārṭaṁ
svāṇi anikāni Ākritānta śanakār avahārayat.

16.50 tato ‘bhūtaṭuvah Pāṛtham praḥṣaṭah Pāṇḍu Śṛiñyayaḥ
Pāṇcālaś ca manośjaḥbhṛ vaṅbhiḥ śūryam īva’ rṣayaḥ
evaṁ svāṣībāram praśaḥ jītvā śatūṁ Dhananjayaḥ
prṣṭhataḥ sarvaśainyāṇaṁ mudito vai sa Keśavaḥ.

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to themselves, Now Duryodhana’s wish will come to pass and then, as Drona promised Dhrita-rashtra’s son, he will come for us.

But even as such words were on their lips, with the wheels of his chariot grinding, the mighty warrior and son of Kunti was quickly among your own, rising suddenly out of the river rife with shoals of arrows foaming to its surface and all crowded with ghosts and thick with the trunks and bones of dead heroes, the river that fountained from the havoc Drona had brought. The Diademèd Warrior scattered Kurus before him and made straight for Drona’s guard and cast across them a wide and bewildering net of arrows as he went. Quick and unrelenting flew his missiles as over and over he notched another onto his string. Soon the very shape of the fabled son of Kunti vanished before our eyes. O king the horizon itself could no more been seen, nor could the space near or far above our heads, nor the earth beneath our feet. The last moments of sunset were invisible through the dust and under that wooden darkness spread upon us by the bow Gandiva the battlefield too had disappeared. There were only arrows.

We could make out neither friend nor enemy. Drona, Duryodhana and the other Kuru generals signaled the retreat. When he realized that the terror he had whipped up among them had forced them to cease battle, slowly and contemptuously Arjuna drew back his own men. The Pandus, the Srinjayas and the Panchalas were overjoyed. They poured their praise on Partha in beautiful words like sages in thrall to the sun. With his foes defeated and Keshava at his side, Dhananjaya son of Pandu made his way back in high
Maha-Bhārata VII — Drona I

masāraigailarkaśuvarṇajṝpyair
vajrapravālaśphaṭikaiś ca mukhyaḥ
citre rathe Pāṇḍuṣuto babhāse
nakṣatra/citre viyat’ iva candrāḥ.

Saṃjaya uvāca.

17.1  | TE SENE ŚĪBIRAM GATVĀ NYAVIŚETĀM, VIṢĀM PATE,
yathābhāgaṁ yathānyāyaṁ yathāgulmaṁ ca sarvaśaṁ.
kṛtvā avahāraṁ sainyānaṁ Dronaḥ paramajūrmanaṁ
Duryodhanam abhipreksya sāvṛīdam idam abravīt.
«uktam etan mayā pūrvam: na tiṣṭhati Dhanamjaye
śākya grahitum saṃgrāme devair api Yudhiṣṭhirāḥ.
iti tad vah prayatatāṁ kṛtāṁ Pārthena saṃyuge.
mā viśāṅkīr vaco mahyam ajeyau KraṇaḥPāṇḍavau.
apanīte tu yogena kena cic chveta\vahane
tata esyatī te, rājan, vaśam adya Yudhiṣṭhirāḥ.
kaś cid āhavatāṁ saṃkhye deśam anyaṁ prakarṣatu
tam ajitvā na Kaunteyo nivarteta kathām cana.
etasmīn antare sūnye Dharma rājam ahaṁ nṛpa
graḥiṣyāmi camūṁ bhītvā Dhṛṣṭadyumnasa paśyataḥ.
Arjunena vihinās tu yadi n’ōṣṭjate raṇam
mām upāyāntam ālokaṁ grhitaṁ viddhi Pāṇḍavaṁ.
evam te ṣaṁ, mahāṛāja, dharmaputram Yudhiṣṭhiram
samāneṣyāmi saṅgaṇaṁ vaśam adya na saṃśayaḥ.

17.10  | YADI TIṢṬHATI SAMGRĀME MUḤURTAM API PĀṆḌAVAḤ
ath’ āpayāti samgrāmād vijayāt tad viśiyate.»

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spirits to his tent at the rear of the camp. Atop his chariot spangled in the finest quartz and coral and diamonds interwrought with gold, crystals and sapphires, he shone like the moon among a million stars.

SÁNJAYA spoke.

The two armies went back to their tents and everyone retired to the different quarters of the camp. But having forced this stalemate with the enemy Drona was plunged into deep despair. He raised his eyes to Duryódhana and his words were tinged with shame.

“What I said before has been proven true. As long as Dhanan-jaya is by his side Yudhi-shthira can be taken only by the gods. And so all your struggles Partha rendered in vain. Be sure of what I say: Krishna and Árjuna are invincible. But if their white horses can be drawn off somehow, then in a moment, my king, Yudhi-shthira will be yours. Someone must challenge Árjuna and lure him to somewhere far from the midst of the fray, since the heir born to Kunti will not weaken as long as Árjuna remains unbowed. If the good king were alone for just a brief time then my lord I could break his line and snatch him from Dhriṣṭa-dyumna’s vigilant gaze. As long as he keeps to the field even when bereft of Árjuna, you can be assured that when you see me next I will have Yudhi-shthira in chains. Believe me great king, I will bring the child of righteousness and all his cohorts under your command, and I will do so soon. If the son of Pandu stays on the plain for just a passing moment then he will leave the war and any hope of victory behind him.”
MAHA-BHÁRATA VII — DRONA I

SAMJAYA UVÁCA.

Dronasya tad vacaḥ śrutva Trigart’ādhipatis tataḥ bhrāṭṛbhīḥ sahito, rājan, idaṃ vacanam abraviḥ.

"vayaṃ vinikṛtā rājan sādā Gaṇḍivaḍhanvanā anāgaḥsv api c’ āgaskṛd asmāṣu Bharaṭa’ṛṣabhā.
teyevaṃ smaramāṃśā tān vinikārān prāhagvidhān krodh’āgninā dāhyamāṇā na śemāḥi sādā niśā.
sa no diṣṭy” āstrāsampanṇaṃ cāksurviṣayam āgataḥ kartāraḥ saṃ vayaṃ karma yaḥ cikīrṣāma hṛdīgatam.

17.15 bhavataś ca priyaṃ yat syād asmākaṃ ca yaśaṣkaraṃ
evayaṃ enaṃ halinyāmo nikṛṣyā’ yodhanād bhāhiḥ.
ady āṣtv api Arjunā bhūmir a’Trigart” ātha vā punaḥ
tsayaṃ te pratijñānīmo n’ āitan mithyā bhavisyati."
evayaṃ Satyaratśa c’ ēkṛtvā Satyadharmā ca Bhārata
Satyavrataṣa ca Satyesaḥ Satyakarmā tath’ āiva ca
saḥita bhrāstaraḥ paśca rathānām ayutena ca
nyavartanta mahārāja kṛtvā śapatham āhave.
Mālavās Tuṇḍikeraḥ ca rathānām ayutais tribhīḥ
Susārām ca naraśvāghras Traigartaḥ Prasthal’ādhipaḥ

17.20 Māvellakair Lalitthaś ca sahito Madrakair api
rathānām ayuten’ āiva so ṣāmad bhrāṭṛbhīḥ saha
nānājanapadebhyaś ca rathānām ayutam punaḥ
samutthitaṃ viśiṣṭaṃṇāṃ śapath’ārtham upāgamat.
tato jvalanam ānāya kṛtvā sarve pṛṭhak pṛṭhak
jagṛhuh kuśacitrani citrāṇi kavacāni ca.

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O king, the lord of the Tri-gartas and his brothers heard what Drona said. Suśarman turned to address Duryódha-na.*

“O king and bull of the Bharatas. Although we commit no sin, every day we suffer the abuse of that evildoer who bears the bow Gandiva. When we meditate on his many insults in the dead of night we burn in flames of anger that consume our hours of rest. If he raises his bow once more at us then we will surely be the authors of that deed for which we have hoped in the innermost chambers of our hearts. May our promise please you and may it bring us fame. We will kill him and drag his corpse off the plain. This will not be undone: the world will no longer hold both Árjuna and the brothers ‘Tri-gartha.”

And so it was o Bhárata that with these words a sacred vow was sworn between his five brothers Satya-ratha, Satya-dharman, Satya-vrata, Satyéshu and Satya-karman. They came forth with their thousand chariots. At the head of the Málavas and Tundikéras and his own massive armies the ‘Tri-garta tiger Sushárman lord of Prasthala went in step with brothers. Then came the panoplies of the Mavélakas, the Lalítthas and the Mádrakas, and a final great legion made up of folk tatterdemalion. The sealing of the vow in that mighty assembly began. A pyre was built high, and with bunches of sacred grass and bright chips of bark each performed his rite. Their armor was bound with ribbons and anointed with oil. They took bunches of grass in their hands and tied girdles of hemp around their waists. Those heroes of unreckonable gifts were sacrificers with heirs and
te ca badhātanautrāṇā ghrṣṭāktaḥ kuśaścīrīṇaḥ maurvīmekhalino vīrāḥ sahasraśrataḍakṣiṇaḥ yajvānāḥ putriṇo lokāḥ kṛtaṇīyās tanaṇīyāḥ yokṣyamaṇāḥ tad” ātmāṇaḥ yaśasā vijayena ca brahmaścaryāśrutīmukhāḥ kratubhiḥ c’ aparśaḍakṣiṇaiḥ prāpya lokān suṣyuddhena kṣipram eva yīyāsavaḥ brahmaṇaḥṣaḥ tarpayitva ca niśkān dattvā prthak prthak gāṣ ca vāsaṃsi ca punaḥ samabhāṣya parasparam prajāvāla kṛṣṇavrtaṃnam upāgamya raṇe vratam tasminn aṅgau tādā cakrūḥ pratijñām dṛḍhainiścayāḥ.

ṣṝṇatam sarvaḥbhūtānām uccair vācō babhāṣire dhṛtaṃ Dhanamjayaṇavadhe pratijñām c’ āpi cakrire. "ye vai lokās c’ anūrināḥ ye ca vai brahmāghatiṇām madyapasya ca ye lokā guruṇḍarātasya ca 17.25 brahmaśvahārināḥ c’ āiva rājaśṛṅḍ śāpaḥ śāraṇāṃ gataṃ ca tyajato yācāmanām tathā ghnataḥ agāraḍāhināṃ c’ āiva ye ca gāṃ nighnātam api apakārīṇāṃ ca ye lokā ye ca brahmaśvāścāpi svabhāryām tuṣkāleṣu mohād vai n’ abhiṣagchhatām śṛddhaṃaitihuniṇākanām ca ye c’ āpy atmiśaḥpahārīṇām nṛyaśapahārīṇāṃ ye ca śrutaṃ nātayatāṃ ca ye klibena yudhyamāṇānāṃ ye ca niśānusarīṇāṃ nāstikānām ca ye lokā ye ’gnīmārīputiśťyajāṃ tān āpnuyāmahe lokān ye ca pāpakṛtām api 17.30 yady aḥhatvā vayaṃ sarve nivartema Dhanamjayaṇam tena c’ abhyarditās trāsād bhavema hi paraścīmukhāḥ. yadi tv aśukarāṃ loke karmā kuryāma saṃyuge īṣṭāl lokān prāṇayeḥ vayaṃ adya na saṃśayāḥ." 154
THE DEATH OF THE BEHOLDEN

domains, men of duty, warriors who had abandoned life and turned their hearts to glory and triumph. Through pious and solemn rites rich with largesse they prepared for the realms where battle would bring them, and now were eager to fight on. They rewarded their priests with gifts of coins, cows and cloth, and speaking once more among themselves agreed on their oath and set alight the fire that brings all to black.

With iron wills they forged their promise in those flames. To make even firmer their resolve to kill Dhanan-jaya they declaimed these words to all who could hear them.

“There are men who break the law. Who kill and cast out priests and plunder kings. Drunks who toy with their teachers’ wives. Men who turn away the needy, who kill beggars, who slaughter cows and burn down homes, who scorn the gods or lie with their wives when it is forbidden or fornicate at the funerals of their fathers. Men who skirmish with the weak, who hang on the words of idiots, infidels who walk away from their hearths and their elders. There are men who destroy themselves and the rules by which we live. May we share their fate if in fear we turn our backs to our task. But we say this: if in battle we achieve our arduous goal then we will ascend to the places where the blessed dwell.”

17.25

17.30

17.35

155
evam uktvā tato, rājaṁ, te bhayavartanta saṁyuge
āhvayanto rjunam vīrāh pitṛjuṣṭāṁ diṣaṁ prati
āhūtas tair naraśyāghrahiḥ Pārthaḥ paraśpurāṁjayaḥ
Dharmarājaṁ idaṁ vākyam apad̀āntaram abravīt.

«āhūto na nivarteyam iti me vrataṁ āhītam
Saṁśāptakāś ca māṁ rājaṁ āhvayanti mahāṁrūdhre.

17.40
eṣa ca bhṛṭṛbhīḥ sārdhaṁ Suśāṁ āhvayate rāne,
vadhāya saṅgaṇasya 'asya māṁ anujñātum arhasi.

niṣ āitac chāknomi saṁsodhum āhvānaṁ, puruṣaṁraśaḥ,
satyam te pratiṇāṇāṁ hatāṁ viddhi parāṇ yuddhi.»

YUDHIŚTHIRA UVĀCA.

srutaṁ te tattvatas, tāta, yad Droṇa cikirṣitaṁ
yathā tad anīṭṭhāṁ tasya bhavet tat tvāṁ saṁcāra.
Droṇo hi balavāṁ śūraḥ kṛtāstraś ca jitaśramam
pratiṇātāṁ ca ten āitad grahaṇaṁ me, mahāratha.

ARJUNA UVĀCA.

ayaṁ vai Śatya-jī, rājaṁ, adya tvā rakṣitā yuddhi
dhrīyaṁāne tu Pāṇcałye niṣ ācāryah kāmam apṣyati.

17.45
hate tu puruṣaṁvyāghre raṇe Śatya-jīti, prabhō,
sarvair api sametair vā na sthātavyam kathāṁ cana.

SAṂJAYA UVĀCA.

anujñātas tato rājīṁ parīṣyaṅktaś ca Phalgunāḥ
preṁna dṛṣṭas ca bahudhā hy aśīṣaś c 'asya yojitaḥ
vīhāyā āinaṁ tataḥ Pārthas Triṅgārūṇ pratyayād bali
kṣudhitaṁ kṣudvighāt ārtham śimho mṛgaṅgaṁṇ iva.
tato Dauryodhanam saṁyāṁ mudā paramayā yutam
ṛte 'rjunam bhrāṁ kruddhaṁ Dharmarājasya nigrāhe.
THE DEATH OF THE BEHOLDEN

O majesty, with these words the mighty brothers went forth and called out Árjuna’s name south across the land. When he heard their tiger’s roars Partha the conqueror of cities spoke to the good king these urgent words.

“My king I have vowed never to refuse a challenge. Beholden* are summoning me. Súshárman and his brothers are calling me out to fight. You must grant me leave to crush them and their troops. Bull in the herd of men I cannot resist this challenge, but I can promise that a handful of your foes are as good as dead.”

Yudhiṣṭhira spoke.

Brother. You have heard exactly what it is that Drona intends: make sure that his aim remains a hollow one. You are a great warrior, but Drona is a mighty hero too, a master of the bow who suffers hardship unbending, and he it is who has vowed to capture me.

Árjuna spoke.

You have a protector here before you, majesty, in Sátyajit. While this son of Panchali lives our teacher’s desire will remain unfulfilled. O king, the tiger Sátyajit will fall only when no warrior on earth still stands.

Sánjaya spoke.

The king granted the Red Star Fighter his leave and then embraced him with deep affection. Equipped with his blessing alone, brave Partha left the king and rode out for the Tri-gártas like a lion at a herd of deer raving to quell its hunger. And Duryodhana’s army swelled in frenzy, inflamed with the prospect of capturing the good king once Árjuna had been dispatched. The two armies crashed together like
MAHA-BHÁRATA VII — DRONA I

tato ‘nyonyena te sene samājagmatur ojasā
Gaṅgā Sarayvau vegena prāṛṣṭ’ iv ‘olbaṇ’ōdake.

SAMJAYA UVĀCA.

18.1 TATAH ŚAMŚAPTAKA, rājan, same deśe vyavasthitāḥ
vyūhy’ ānikiṃ rathair eva candr’ākāraṃ mudā yutāḥ,
te Kṛiṭinam ayāntam drṣṭva harenā mārīṣa
udakrośaṇa naraśyāghṛāḥ sābdena mahatā tadā,
sa sābdhaḥ pradīṣaḥ sarvā diśaḥ khaṃ ca samāvṛṇot
āvṛttavāc ca lokasya n’ asit tatra pratisvanah,
ativa samprahṛṣṭaṃ tān upalabhya Dhanamjayaḥ
kiṃ cid abhyutsmayan Kṛṣṇam idaṃ vacanam abravit.

18.5 ‘paśy’ āitān Devakīmātār mumūṣyūn adya samyuge
bhṛṛṭṛṣnaḥ Trigartakān eva roditavye prahṛṣṭān.
atha vā harsākalo ‘yam Trigartānām aṣaṁśāyam
kuñnarair durjavāpān hi lokān prāpsyanty anuṭṭāmanān.’
evam ukṛta mahaḥbhub Hṛṣikeṣaṃ tato ‘ṛjunaḥ
āsāda raṇe vyūḍhānaḥ Trigartānām anikiniṃ.
sa Devadattam āḍaya saṅkhaṁ hemaṃprāśrakṛtaṃ
dadhmau vegena mahatā ghoṣen’ āpūravanā diśaḥ.
tenā sābdena vitrāṭa Śaṁśaptakāvaraṭhīna
niśceṣṭ’ avasthitā saṅkhyaḥ hy aṃśāsāraṁayi yathā.

18.10 vāhās teśāṃ viṃśt’ākṣaḥ stabdhākarṣaṇaṁ ca
vistabdhaṇaṁ tātmārṇaḥ rudhīram ca prasusruvuhuḥ,
upalabhya tataḥ saṃjñaṁ avasthāpya ca vahinīm
yugapat Pāṇḍuṣputrāya cikṣipuḥ kanikaṇapatriṇāḥ,
tāny Arjunaḥ sahasrāṇi ċaḍa paṁcabhīr āṣūrgaiḥ
anāgaṭāṇy eva śaṇaiḥ cicchēd’ aṣūpurākramāḥ,
tato ‘ṛjunaḥ śitair bānair dāsabhīr daśābhīḥ punaḥ

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Drona
Version 2.0
the Ganges and Sárayu plunging their rainswollen waters into the immensity of the ocean.

SÁNJAYA spoke.

O majesty. The Beholden were drawn up together, their chariots arranged in the figure of the moon. They bristled with anticipation. When those tigers laid their eyes on the Diademmed Warrior as he rode near they let out a delirious cry so loud that it filled every quarter of the sky and smothered its own echo. Dhanan-jaya observed their excitement. He smiled slightly, turned to Krishna and spoke.

“Look at them o son of Dévaki: the brothers Tri·garta, so soon to meet their end. Giddy with joy when they should be weeping. Or perhaps it is time for the Tri·gartas to rejoice, since they are bound for realms beyond the reach of fools.”

With these words to Hrishi·kesha, strongarmed Árjuna rode into battle against the serried ranks of the Tri·gartas. Raising the conch Deva·datta to his lips he blew deep and filled the air with its sound. Its note blared out above the army of the Beholden and fear stole across every one of them. For a moment they froze still on the battlefield as if cast in iron. Their horses rolled their eyes, necks and ears stiffening, motionless but for the bloodcolored piss running down their shanks.

Then the brothers Tri·garta gathered their wits. They rallied their troops and as one loosed their heronfeathered arrows at Pandu’s son. But before they even reached him Árjuna nimbly split the hundredfold volley with swift shafts of his own. Ten whetted darts then ten again they let fly at Árjuna, and Partha knocked them all away. Back he shot...
pratyāvidhyāṁ tataḥ Pārthas tāṁ avidhyat triśhis triśhīḥ.

ekājākas tu tataḥ Pārthaṁ rājan vivyādha pañcabhīḥ
sa ca tāṁ prativyādha dvābhyaṁ dvābhyaṁ parākrami.

bhūya eva tu saṃkruddhāṁ te īrjunāṁ saba|Kṛśavaṁ
āpūrayan śaraṁ tūraṁ taṭākam iva vrśṭibhīḥ.
tataḥ śaraṁ sahastraṁ prāpatann Arjunaṁ prati
bhāramrāṇam iva vrāṭāḥ phullāṁ drumaṅgaṇam vane.
tataḥ Subāhus triṃśadbhir adriśāraṁ mayair dṛḍhāḥ
avidhyad iṣubhir gāḍhāṁ Kṛīṭe Savyasācinam.
taiḥ Kṛīṭi kṛīṭaṁ thair hemaṁ purikhair ajihaṁgaṁ
śaṭākumbhaṁ mayaṁʻāpiḍo baḥbau yūpa iva ūcchritaḥ.
haṣṭāvāpaṁ Subāhos tu bhallaṇa yuddhi Pāṇḍavaḥ
ciccheda taṁ c`āvina punaḥ śaraṁ varṣair avākirit.

tataḥ Susārmā daśabhīḥ Surathaṁ ca Kṛīṭinam
Sudharmā Sudhanuṣ c`āvina Subāhus ca samārpayan.
tāṁs tu sarvān prthag bāṇair
vānaṁ pravaraṁ dvājaḥ
pratyāvidhyad dhvajāṁś c`āśaṁ
bhallaṁ ciccheda kañcanan.
Sudhanvano dhanuṣaṁ chittvā hayāṁś c`āsy āvadhiḥ charaiḥ
atḥ`āṣya saḥīraṁ triṇaṁ śiraḥ kāyāṁ apāharaṁ.

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three and three again. O majesty, each Tri-garta struck Par-
tha with five of his arrows but with twin shafts he struck
back at each. In a tumult of anger they poured their missiles 18.15
unrelentingly on Árjuna and on Késhava, rain upon a pool,
and hundreds of them plummeted down as when swarms of
bees in a forest descend on swaths of openpetalled flowers.
Subáhu sent thirty arrows of solid iron into the crown Árju-
na wore, and with his head studded in those goldfeathered
and trueflying shafts Kirítin stood tall like a sacrificial stake
capped in ingots of river gold.

The son of Pandu fought back. With a barbed missile he
preferred apart the very guard protecting Subáhu's hand and
then let fly a downpour of darts upon his head. Ten arrows 18.20
flew back at the Diademed Warrior from the five bows of
Sushárman, Súratha, Sudhárman, Subáhu and Súdhanus.
Yet while the flag of the monkey fluttered over his head one
by one with his barbed arrows Árjuna pierced and tattered
each of their golden oriflammes, and then he split Súdha-
nus' bow in two, transfixed his horse and at last tore the
warrior's still-helmeted head from his neck.
Here is a new Clay Sanskrit Library edition and translation of Volume One (of three) of “Drona,” Book Seven of the Mahabharata.

The heart of the epic is the eighteen-day battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, filling five books. The battle books yield the finest poetry of the Mahabharata. “Drona” is itself a vast text, and runs almost to the length of the entire “Iliad.”

Here we join the action during an uneasy hiatus after ten days of fighting. The warring cousins stand face to face on the battlefield, awestruck by the fall of Bhishma. Now it is Drona’s turn to take his place as the leader of Duryodhana’s armies, despite his ongoing personal conflicts as mentor to both the Pandava and Kaurava heroes in their youth.

Like all great art, the Mahabharata fascinates for reasons we cannot explain. It does not offer simple moral lessons or comforting fables, but depicts, on a canvas broader than any before or since, the fecundity and chaos of human life. We can recognize much here; one might say that the great Indian epic was, and in parts of the world still is, a cinema before electricity.