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Here is a new Clay Sanskrit Library translation of Volume Two (of two) of “Shalya,” Book Nine of the Maha·bhárata.

In one of the most famous sequences in the epic, Dur·yódhana, the heroic but corrupt king of the Káuravas, meets his end when he is dishonorably defeated in combat by his archenemy, Bhima, struck by a mace, below the navel. Their duel poignantly portrays the downfall of a once great fighter in the face of a new order governed by Krishna, in which the warrior code is brushed aside to ensure the predestined triumph of the Pándavas.

The narrative of the mace battle itself frames a lengthy account of the merits of worshiping at sacred sites along the Sarásvati river. Krishna’s brother Bala·rama had departed on his pilgrimage having failed to persuade Krishna not to take sides in the war. Now, again, the ignoble victory of the Pándavas drives him away in disgust.

The uncertainties and ambiguities that pervade the Maha·bhárata are exemplified here in the most flawed of its flawed heroes, King Dur·yódhana, a paradigm of martial strength but so blinded by his pride and arrogance that he brings ruin to his allies and clan.
CONTENTS

Sanskrit alphabetical order 7
CSL conventions 7

MAHA·BHÁRATA IX – SHALYA II

Introduction 13

30–33  Dur-yódhana Challenged 31
34    Rama Arrives 83
35–54  Sarásvati’s Sacred Sites 89
55–57  The Duel 279
58    Dur-yódhana Defeated 311
59–61  Insults and Rebukes 325
62–63  Krishna Aids 357
64–65  Dur-yódhana Defiant 381

Notes 399

Proper Names and Epithets 413
Index 435
Sandhi Grid 466
55–57
THE DUEL
vaiśampāyana uvāca:

55.1 evaṃ tad abhavaḥ yuddhāṁ tumulaṁ Janamejaya
yatra duḥkhāṁtuṇvito rāja Dhṛtarāṣṭro 'bravid idam.

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca:
Rāmaṁ samnihitam dṛṣṭvā gadāyuddha upasūhitē
mama putraḥ kathaṁ Bhīmaṁ pratyaudhyata Saṅjaya?

saṅjaya uvāca:
Rāmaśāṃniḥdhyāṁ āśāya putro Duryodhānaṁ tava
yuddhaṁkāmo mahābāhuḥ samahṣṭyata viryaṁvān.
dṛṣṭvā lāṅgalaṁ rāja pratyutthāya ca Bhārata
prītyā paramāya yuktāḥ samabhārīcā yathāvidhi
āsanaṁ ca dadau tasmai paryapṛcchad anāmayaṁ.

55.5 tato Yudhiṣṭhirāṁ Rāmo vakṣyam etad uvāca ha
madhurāṁ dharmāṁsamyuktāṁ śūrāṁhitam eva ca:
«mayā śrutāṁ kathayatāṁ rājaṁ rājaśattamā
Kuruśṛtraṁ paraṁ punyaṁ pāvānam svargyam eva ca
daivatair rṣibhir jñānam ṛṣibhir brahmaṁ ātmaṁ bhūṁ.
tatra vai yotsyanāṁ ye dehaṁ tyakṣyantī mānavaṁ
tesāṁ svargaṁ dhṛvuḥ vāsāḥ Śakreṇā saha mārīcā.
tasmā Samantapāṇīkām ito yāma ṛṣitaṁ ṛṣitā
prāhitāṁ ottarāvedi śā devāloke Prājapateḥ,
tasmin mahāpuṇyaṁtāme tāṇilokāyaṁ sanātane
samgrāme nidhanāṁ prāpya dhṛvuḥ svargo bhaviṣyaṁ.»

55.10 «tathā ēty» ukāva mahaṁravā Kuntiṇiputra Yudhiṣṭhiraḥ
Samantapāṇīkāmāṁ vīraṁ práyaṁ abhimukhaṁ prabhūḥ.
tato Duryodhānaṁ rāja pragṛhya mahaṁ guṇaṁ
cādām padbhāyām anāmasī dyutimān agacchat Pāṇḍavaṁ saha.

280
VAISHAMPÄYANA said:

This was how that tumultuous battle came about, Janam-ējaya. Regarding it King Dhrita-rashtra said this in his sorrow.

DHRTA-RASHTRA said:

When my son saw Rama arrive just as the mace battle was imminent, how did he fight against Bhima, Sānjaya?

SĀNJAYA said:

At Rama’s arrival, Dur-yōdhana—your powerful and mighty-armed son—became eager for battle and was joyful. When King Yudhi-shthira saw the plow-bearer, he got up and duly worshipped him with great joy, descendant of Bharata. He then gave Rama a seat and asked after his health. Rama then said these words to Yudhi-shthira, which were pleasant, righteous, and beneficial to heroes:

“Best of kings, I have heard seers say that Kuru-kshetra is an extremely sacred and pure place that leads to heaven and is frequented by gods, seers and great-spirited brahmins. Those who give up their bodies in battle there will forever live with Shakra in heaven, my lord. Let us therefore quickly go to Samānta-pāñchaka, Your Majesty. In the realm of the gods, Samānta-pāñchaka is famed as the northern altar of Praja-pati. Those who die in battle in that eternal and most sacred place in the three worlds will certainly reach heaven.”

Agreeing, lord Yudhi-shthira, the heroic son of Kunti, proceeded straight for Samānta-pāñchaka. Full of wrath and splendor, King Dur-yōdhana also took up his huge mace and walked on foot together with the Pāñdavas. The gods that flew in the sky honored him with shouts of approval as...
tathā yāntaṁ gadā/hastaṁ varmaṇā c’ api daṁśitam antarīkṣa/çarā devāḥ «sādhu sādhv ity» api/jayan.
vātikāś cāraṇā ye tu drśtvā te harṣam agataḥ.

sa Paṇḍavaḥ parivṛṭaḥ Kurujrājas tav’ ātmajāḥ mattasyā’ eva gaj’/ēndrasya gatim āsthaṇya so ‘vrajaṭ.
tataḥ śaṅkha’nīnādena bheriṇāṁ ca mahā/svanaiḥ
simha’nādaiś ca śūrāṇām diśaḥ sarvāḥ prapūritāḥ.

55.15 tatas te tu Kurukṣetraṁ prāptā nara/’var’/ōttamaiḥ
pratīcyābbhimukhaṁ deśāṁ yath’/ōddiṣṭaṁ sutena te
dakṣiṇena Sarasvatīḥ svajanaṁ tīrtham uttamam.
tasmin dese tv anjirīne te tu yuddham arocayaṁ.

tato Bhīmo mahā/kōṭiṁ gadāṁ grhya’ āthā varmaḥbhṛt
bibhṛad rūpam mahā/rāja sādṛṣaṁ hi Garutmaṁaḥ.
avabaddha/siras/trāṇāḥ sankhye kāṅcana/valmaḥbhṛt
rārāja rājan putras te kāṅcanaḥ śaila/rād iva.
varmaḥyāṁ saṁyatau virau Bhīma/Duryodhānau ubhau
saṁyuge ca prakāṣete saṁrābdhāv iva kuṇjiṣuau.

55.20 rana/manḍalajamadhye/aṭhau bhṛṭaraṇau tau nara/ṛṣabhau
asobhetuṇaḥ mahā/rāja caṇḍa/sūryāv iv’/ōditau.
tāv anvanyaṁ niṣriṅketiṁ kruddhāv iva mahādvipaṁ
dahantu locanai rājan parasipara/ādhi/āsīṁau.

282
he proceeded mace in hand and clad in armor. The wind-traveling chāranas were filled with joy when they saw him. Although surrounded by the Pāndavas, your son, the king of the Kurus, walked with the gait of a raging king of elephants. All the directions then filled with the blare of conches, the din of drums, and the lion-roars of heroes.

Those supreme champions then arrived at Kurukṣetra and proceeded to a place situated westwards that was designated by your son. Lying to the south of the Saravati, it was an excellent tīrtha that was easy to move about on. It was in this unbarren place that they chose to fight.

Armor-clad Bhima then took hold of his large-tipped mace and assumed an appearance similar to Gāruda, great king. Wearing gold armor and strapping on his protective head-gear in battle, your son looked radiant, Your Majesty, like the golden king of the mountains. Clad in armor, the heroes Bhima and Dur-yūdhana both looked glorious in battle, just like two enraged elephants. Standing in the center of the battle-circle, the two brothers and bull-like men shone radiantly, great king, resembling a risen moon and sun. Burning each other with their eyes and eager to kill each other, they looked at one another askance like two great elephants filled with fury, Your Majesty.
MAHA-BHÄRATA IX — SHALYA II

vaṃśakṛṣṭaṁ manā rājan gadām ādāya Kauravaḥ
śṛṅkiniṁ saṃlihan rājan krodhaṁ kṛkṣṇaḥ śvasan.
tato Duryodhano rājan gadām ādāya viryavān
Bhīmaśenasam abhipreṣya gajau gajam āhavaya.
adyāśārāmayīṁ Bhīmaḥ tath āhav ādāya viryavān
āhavām āsanā­patīṁ śiṃhaṁ śiṃho yathā vane.

55.25 tāvudyata gadaipāṇī Duryodhanavṛkadroauru
sanyuge sma prakāṣetāṁ girī saśikharāv iva,
tāv ubhau samatikruddhvau ubhau bhīmaśapātraṃau
ubhau śīyau gadāyuddhe Rauhiṇeyasya dhīmataḥ.
ubhau sadṛṣākarmāṇau Yama/Vāsavyor iva
tathā sadṛṣākarmāṇau Varunasya mahābalau.
Vāsudevasya Rāmasya tathā Vaiśravaṇasya ca
sadṛṣau taṁ mahārāja Madhu/Kaïṭabhāyor yudhi.
ubhau sadṛṣākarmāṇau tathā Sund’āpasundayoḥ
Rāma/Rāvaṇayoḥ c’ āvau Vālī/Sugrīvayos tathā
tath’ āvau Kālasya samau Mrtyoḥ c’ āvau parāntapau.

55.30 anonyaman abhidhāvantau mattav iva mahādvipau
vāsitāsangame dṛptau śārad’ iva mad’ōṭkatau.
ubhau krodhaṁ dṛptau vamantāv uragāv iva
anonyaman abhisāṃrabdhau prakṣamāṇau arindamau
ubhau Bharataśārdulau vikramaṇa samanvītav.
śiṃhāv iva durśādhaśau gadāyuddhaṁ/viśāradau
nakhādamśṛ’ āyudhau virāu vyāghrav iva durṣaḥau.
prajāsaṃharaṇe kṣubdhau samudrāv iva duṣṭarau
lohit’āṅgāv iva kruddhau prapatpantau mahārathau.
pūrvāpaścimajau meghau prakṣamāṇau arindamau

284
THE DUEL

Joyfully taking up his mace, the Káurava licked the corners of his mouth as he breathed heavily, his eyes red with rage. Mighty Dur-yódhana then took up his mace and glared at Bhima-sena, challenging him like one elephant challenging another, Your Majesty. In the same way, mighty Bhima took up his iron mace and challenged that lord of men, just like one lion challenging another in a forest. Wielding their raised maces, Dur-yódhana and Vrikódara looked glorious in battle, like two peaked mountains. Both were filled with extreme rage, both had terrifying prowess, and both had been disciples in mace-fighting under the wise son of Róhini. Both were similar to Yama or Vásava in their actions and both were men of great power, whose deeds resembled Várūna’s. In battle they were like Vasudéva, Rama, Váishravana,* Madhu or Káitébha, Your Majesty. Both performed deeds that were similar to Sunda and Upasúnda, Rama and Rávana, or Valin and Sugriva, and both were enemy-scorchers who resembled Time and Death.

Charging against each other, they were like two enormous frenzied elephants mad with passion in the fall season and wild with desire to mate with a cow on heat. As they glared at each other in their rage, the enemy-tamers were like two snakes that spit out fiery poison born of wrath. Both were tigers among Bharatas and both were valorous. Skilled in mace combat, the heroes were as dangerous as lions and as difficult to quell as tigers that use claws and teeth as weapons. They were like two uncrossable oceans that swell up to destroy creatures. In their fury, the great warriors blazed as if they were the planet Mars. Those enemy-tamers looked like two clouds that rise in the east and west, thundering...
garjamāṇau suṣṭiṣṭamaṃ kṣarantau prāvṛttaḥ īva hi.

55.35 raṃśiṣṭuktau mahāyatanau diptiṃtau mahābhala
dadṛṣṭate Kuṛuṣreṣṭhau kālaśūryāviv īv oditaau.
vyāgṛhāv īva suṣṭamrābdhau garjantāv īva toya
dadṛṣṭe mahābhāhu simhau kesarīṇāv īva
ghaṇāv īva suṣṭamrābdhau jvalātāv īva pāvaka
dadṛṣṭe mahāyatanau saṣṭiṇāv īva parvatau.

roṣṭat prasphuramānayaṁ dāṇḍhau nirikṣanta pariṣṭaram

55.40 vṛṣabhāv īva garjaṁtau Duryodhana-Vṛkodara
dāntyāv īva balāṇmattau rejatau īva naṁ īПетимаu.

tato Duryodhanāḥ rājann idam āha Yudhishthiram
bhārtrībhīḥ sahitam c āiva Krṣṇena ca mahāyatanāṃ
Rāmeṇyājītaṃ vṛṣṭyājaṃ saṁmattatam

55.45 Kekayaiḥ Śrījaiva dṛptaś Paṅcālaś ca mahāyatmaṁ:
«idam vyaśataṃ yuddhaṃ mama Bhīmaṣyā c'obhaṛyaḥ
upopaviṣṭāḥ paśyadhaṃ sahitair nṛpaṇuṇyagaḥ!»

śrutvā Duryodhana-vacaḥ pratyapadyanta tat tathā.

tataḥ samupaviṣṭat tat suṣṭhamah rājamanḍalam

55.44 virājamanām dadṛṣṭe div īv āditya-manḍalam.
teṣām madhye mahābhāhuḥ śrīmān Keśava-pūrvvaiḥ
upaviṣṭo mahāraja pujyamānaḥ samantataḥ,

sūṣuhbe rājaṃadhyāstho nila[vāsāḥ sita-prabhāḥ
nakṣatrair īva sampūrṇo vṛtto niśi niśākaraḥ.
The duel terribly and pouring down rain in the monsoon season. In their radiance and splendor, the mighty and great-spirited champions of the Kurus looked like two suns that rise when the world is destroyed. Resembling two enraged tigers or thundering clouds, the mighty-armed men bristled with joy like maned lions. The heroes were like two enraged elephants or two burning fires and they resembled peaked mountains.

Glaring at each other, their lips quivering with fury, the two great-spirited and excellent men encountered one another, wielding their maces. Greatly esteemed, they both experienced the highest joy as they neighed like fine horses and trumpeted like elephants. Bellowing like bulls, Duryodhana and Vrikodara—those best of men—looked as glorious as two power-intoxicated daityas.

Duryodhana then said these proud and haughty words to Yudhishthira, Your Majesty, who was accompanied by his brothers, heroic Krishna, infinitely powerful Rama, the Kekayas, Srinjayas, and great-spirited Panchalas:

“Sit with these assembled bull-like kings and watch the battle that has been arranged between me and Bhima!”

Hearing Duryodhana’s words, they all acted accordingly and the huge circle of kings sat down, radiant as a circle of aditya deities in heaven. The glorious and mighty-armed elder brother of Keshava sat down in their midst, honored on all sides, great king. As he sat in the middle of those kings with his blue robes and bright complexion, he resembled the full moon at night when surrounded by stars.
MAHA-BHÁRATA IX — SHALYA II

tau tathā tu mahārāja gadāhastau su-duḥsahau
anyonyaṁ vāgbhir ugrābhiṁ taksamāṇau vyavastihau.
apriyāṁ tato ‘nyonyam uktvā tau Kurusartamau
udikṣantaṁ sthitau virau Vṛtra-Śakrau yath’ āhave.

VAIṢĀMPĀVANA UVĀCA:

56.1  | TATO VĀGYUDDHAM abhavat tumuḷaṁ Janamejaya
| yatra duḥkh’ānvito rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭro ‘bravīd idam:
| ‘dhiṁ astu khalu mānuṣyaṁ yasya niśṭhī’ ēyam iḍṛṣī
ekādaṁca-mūḥbhartā yatra putro mam’ āṇāgahā
| ājñāpya sarvāṁ nṛpatiṁ bhuktvā c’ ēmāṃ vasuṇḍharām
gadām ādāya vegaṁ padāṭhom prasthitō raṇe.
| bhūtvā hi jagatō nātho hy āṇātha ēva me sutaḥ,
gadām udyamya yo yāti kim anyad bhāgadheyaṁ?

56.5  | aho duḥkhaṁ mahat prāptaṁ putreṇa mama Saṇjayaṁ!
| evam uktvā sa duḥkh’ārto virarāma jan’ādhipaḥ.

SAṆJAYA UVĀCA:

sa meghaṁ saṁadhi harṣāṁ ninadāṁ ēva goṇyaṁ
ājūhāva tada Pārthaṁ yuddhāya yudhi viṛyavān.
Bhīmaṁ āhvaṇāṁ tu Kuruvṛjje mahaṁ’ātmanā
prāduraṇā suṇghorāṇi rūpaṁ viśvāntāṁ oṁkaraṁ
vavvur vātāṁ saṁirghāṇaṁ pāṃsu varṣaṁ pāpata ca
babhūvaś ca diśaḥ sarvāṁ timireṇa samāvṛtāḥ.

288
THE DUEL

Wielding their maces and extremely difficult to quell, the two warriors then took up position as they cut into each other with fierce words. Saying harsh words to one another, those heroes and best of Kurus stood there glaring at each other, just as Vritra and Shakra once did in their battle.

VAISHAMPÂYANA said:

There was then a tumultuous contest of words, Janaméjaya, regarding which King Dhrita-rashtra said this in his sorrow:

“How terrible that humans should have the type of end my son has had! Once the leader of eleven armies, Dur-yódhana used to command every king and enjoy this earth, faultless Sánjaya. But he now sets off on foot for the battlefield, swiftly taking up his mace. Once the lord of the world, my son now resembles someone lordless. When he has departed in this way, wielding his mace, what else can this be but fate? Alas Sánjaya! My son has been afflicted by great suffering!”

Saying these words, that lord of the people fell silent, tormented by suffering.

SÁNJAYA said:

With the rumble of a thundercloud, mighty Dur-yódhana roared joyfully like a bull as he challenged Pritha’s son to fight in battle. Various terrifying visions appeared when the heroic king of the Kurus challenged Bhima. Winds and hurricanes blew. A shower of dust fell from the sky and all the directions became covered with darkness. Huge storms thundered loudly, bringing confusion and making...
mahāśvanāḥ suṣ nirvātās tumulā lomaḥ harṣaṇāḥ petus tath' ēolkāḥ śataśaḥ śpoṭayantyo nabhaṣṭalān.

51.10 Rāhuś ca āgrasad ādityam aparvaṇi viśaṃ pate cakampe ca mahākampam prthivi savanaḍrumā. diptās ca vātāḥ pravavur niçaḥ śarkaraśkaśiṇāḥ girīṇaṃ śīkharāṇy eva nyapataṇa maḥiṭale. mrgā bahuvīḍhākārāḥ sampatanti diśo daśa diptāḥ śivaś ca āpy anadan ghorārūpāḥ sudārunāḥ. nirghaṭaṣ ca mahāghorā bahbhūvur lomaḥharṣaṇāḥ. diptāyāṃ diśi rāj'endra mrgās ca 'ājābhaśvedināḥ. udapānāgatās ca āpo vyavardhanta samantataḥ aśaṁrā mahānādaḥ śruṇyante sma tadā nṛpa.

51.15 evamādindī dṛṣṭv' ātha nimittāni Vṛkodaraḥ uvāca bhrātaraṃ īyeṣṭhaṃ Dharmaśrājaṃ Yudhiṣṭhiram:
"n' āśa śakto raṇe jetuṃ mand'ātma māṃ Suyodhanaḥ. adya krodhaṃ vimokṣyāmi viguḍhaṃ hṛdaye cīram Suyodhana Kaurav'endre Khāṇḍave Pāvako yathā. śalyam adya' odhārisyāmi tava Pāṇḍava hṛcchayam nihaṭya gadaḍaḥ pāpam iṁmaṃ Kurukṣuḷ'ādhamam. adya kṛṣṭiṃvaśa malaṃ pratimokṣyāmy ahaṃ tvai hatv' ēmaṃ pāpaṁ karmāṇaṃ gadaḍaḥ raṇaṃmūrdhani. adya' śya śatadha dehaṃ bhinadmi gadaḍa' āṇāya. n' āyaṃ praveṣṭa nagaraṃ punar vāraṇaśahvayam.
THE DUEL

one’s hair stand on end. Hundreds of meteors fell to the ground, bursting through the firmament. Rahu swallowed the sun at an irregular moment and the earth trembled violently, along with its forest and trees, lord of the people. Blazing winds began to blow, pouring down gravel, and mountain peaks fell to the ground. Wild animals with various forms charged about in all ten directions. Terrifying, blazing jackals roared with gruesome appearances. Hideous whirlwinds arose, making one’s hair stand on end. The directions blazed brightly and wild beasts heralded ill fortune. The water in the wells swelled on all sides, Your Majesty, and one could hear huge roars that had no physical body as their source.

Seeing such signs, Vriksodara said these words to his elder brother Yudhi-shthira, the King of Righteousness:

"It is impossible for dim-witted Su-yodhana to conquer me in battle today. Against Su-yodhana, the king of the Kauravas, I will today release the anger that has long remained hidden in my heart, just as Fire once released his anger onto the Khanda forest. Today I will extract the dart that lies in your heart, Pandava, and with my mace I will kill this sinner, the lowest of the Kuru clan. Slaughtering this evil-doer with my mace at the front of the battlefield, I will today place a garland of glory around your neck. With this mace, I will today split Dur-yodhana’s body into a hundred pieces. He will never again enter the elephant-named city of Hastinapura."
56.20 sarpaōtsargasya śayane viśadānasya bhojane
Prāmanakotyām pātasya dhāsya jatu/veśmanī,
sabhāyāṁ avahāsasya sarvāvaharaṇasya ca
varṣam ajñātāvāsasya vanajāvāsasya c’ ānāgha,
ady’ āntam eśāṁ duḥkhānāṁ gant’ āham Bharata’sabha.
ek’āhnā viṁhārytā ‘ēmaṁ bhaviṣyāmy ātmano ’niṣṭhe.
ady’ āyur Dhārtarāṣṭrasya durṣmater aṅkṛt’ātmanaḥ
samāptaṁ Bharataśreṣṭhā mātāpiṭroś ca dārānam.
adya saukhyāṁ tu rāj’ēndra Kuru/rājasya durṣmateḥ
samāptaṁ ca mahārāja nātiṇāṁ dārānam punaḥ.

56.25 ady’ āyaṁ Kuru/rājasya Śāntanoḥ kulaipāṇsanaḥ
prānāṁ śriyaṁ ca rājyaṁ ca tyaktvā śesati bhūtale.
rājā ca Dhārtarāṣṭro ‘dyā śrutvā putraṁ nipātitam
smarṣityat a/subhaṁ karma yat tae Chakunī/buddhijom.’
ity uktvā rājāśaśārdula gadam adaya viravāṁ
abhyaṭiṣṭhata yuddhāya Śakra Vṛṭtram iv’ āhvaṇaṁ.
tam udyataigadaṁ dṛṣṭvā Kailāsāṁ iva śṛngiṣam
Bhīmasenāḥ punaḥ kruddho Duryodhanam uvāca ha:
>rājinaś ca Dhārtarāṣṭrasya tathā tvam api c’ ātmanaḥ
smara tad duṣṭkṛtaṁ karma yad vṛttaṁ Varaṇāvate.

56.30 Draupadi ca parikliṣṭā sabhā/maḍhye rajasvalā.
dyute ca vaṁcito rājā yat tvayā Saubalena ca.
vane duḥkhāṁ ca yat prāptam asmāḥhis tvaṅkṛtaṁ mahat
Virāṭanagare c’ āiva yonyaṇantarāgataiśaiva

292
THE DUEL

Dur-yódhana dispatched snakes against me in my sleep. He laced my food with poison. He threw me into the river at Pramána-koti. He set fire to the lac house. He laughed at us in the assembly hall. He stole all our possessions. We endured a life of disguise for a year and a life in the forest, faultless Yudhíśthíra.* Today I will end these sufferings, bull of the Bharatas. By slaughtering this man, I will erase my debts in a single day.

On this day the life of Dhrita-rashtra’s foolish and corrupt son will come to an end. He will never again see his mother and father, best of Bharatas. On this day, king of kings, the villainous monarch of the Kurus will cease to be happy and will never again look upon women. On this day he will give up his life, glory and kingdom and will lie on the ground, having defiled the family of Shántanu’s son, that king of the Kurus. On this day King Dhrita-rashtra will learn that his son has fallen and remember the evil deeds that sprang from Shakuni’s mind.”

Saying these words, tiger-like king, mighty Bhima took up his mace and stood ready to fight, like Shakra challenging Vítríra. When he saw Dur-yódhana wielding his mace and looking like the peaked mountain Kailáśa, Bhíma-sena once again became filled with rage and said to Dur-yódhana:

“Remember the evil deeds that you and king Dhrita-rashtra performed at Varánaváta. Dráupádi was wronged in the assembly hall while she was menstruating. Both you and Sañcara’s son deceived King Yudhíśthíra in a game of dice. Today I will avenge the great suffering that you caused us, both when we were in the forest and when we were living..."
MAHA-BHÄRATA IX — SHALYÄ II

tat sarvaṇaḥ pātayāmy adya. diṣṭyā dṛṣṭo 'si duṟimate!
tvaṭākṛte 'saḥ hataḥ śete śaraṇalpe pratāpavān
gāṇgeyo rathināṁ śreṣṭho nihato Yājñaseninā.
hato Dṛṣṭas ca Karṇaḥ ca tathā Śalyaḥ pratāpavān
vaivṝjgarṇ adīkārt” āsau Śakuniḥ Saubalo hataḥ.
prātiṁśiṁ tataḥ pāpo Draupadyāḥ kleśakṛtṛd hataḥ
bhṛśarars te hataḥ sarve śuṛa vikrāntāyodhinaḥ.

56.35 ete c’ ānye ca bahavo nihaṭas tvaṭākṛte nṛpāḥ.
   tvām adya nihaniśyāmi gadayā. n’ ātra sāṃśayah.”
   ity evam uccai rāj’ēndra bhāṣamaṇam Vṛṣodaraṁ
   uvaça gataḥbhī rājan putras te satyāvikramaḥ:
   “kiṁ katthanena bahunā? yudhyasva tvam Vṛṣodaraṁ
   adya te ‘haṁ vinyaśyāmi yuddhaśraddhāṁ kal’ādhamaṁ
da hi Duryodhanaḥ kṣudra kena cīt tvadvidhena vai
   sākṣyaśa trāsayaituṇa vāca yath” ānyāḥ prākṛto naraḥ.
cirakāl’ēpsitaṁ diṣṭyā ṇṛddyāsthāṁ idaṁ māma.
tvayā saha gādāyuḍhaṁ triḍāsāīr upapādītam.
kiṁ vācā bahun’” ēktena katthitena ca duṟimate?
vāṇi sampadyatāṁ esa karmāṇaḥ mā ciraṁ kṛthaḥ!”
tasya tad vacanaṁ śrutvā sarva ev’ ābhypojaṇaṁ
rājānaḥ Somakās c’ āiva ye tattr’ āsan samāgataḥ.
tataḥ sampūjitaḥ sarvasaṁ sampriḥṣṭaṁ tantar’ruhaṁ
bhūyo dhīrām matiṁ cakre yuddhāya Kuruṁandanaḥ.
unmatam iva mātaṅgaṁ talāśabdaṁ nār’ādhipāḥ
bhūyaḥ saṁharṣayaṁ cakru Duryodhanam aṁaṁśaṇaṁ.

294
in Virāṭa’s city, pretending to be men with altered births.

How splendid it is to see you, you villain!

It is because of you that Bhishma, that mighty son of Ganga and best of chariot-warriors, lies dead on a bed of arrows, slaughtered by Yajnasena’s son.* Drona has been killed, as have Karna and mighty Shalya. Shākuni, the son of Sūbala—the initiator of this blazing feud—has also been slain. The evil usher who wronged Drāupadi is also dead, and all your heroic and courageous brothers have been slaughtered. These and many other kings have died for your sake. Today I will kill you with my mace. I have no doubt about that.”

While Vrikṣodara bellowed in this way, your fearless and truly valiant son replied with these words, king of kings:

“Why all this talk? You should fight, Vrikṣodara! Today I will dispel your faith in battle, lowest of the Pāṇḍava family! Measly wretch, Dur-yōḍhana is not some ordinary person that can be terrified by the words of a man such as you.

How fortunate I am! This has long been my heart’s desire. The gods must have arranged this mace battle with you. What is the use of words and longwinded speeches, you fool! Fulfill your words with action! Cease your delaying!”

On hearing his words, the kings and the Sāmakas who had gathered there all honored Dur-yōḍhana. Honored by all these men, that delight of the Kurus felt his hair bristle and once again firmly set his heart on battle. By clapping their hands, those lords of men cheered on wrathful Dur-yōḍhana still further, like men stirring a frenzied elephant.


MAHA-BHÅRATA IX – SHALYA II

56.45 brahmânti kuṇijârâs tatra háyya hreśânti c’ āsakr
sasrâṇi c’ āpy adîpâyanta Pânḍavânamî jay’âîśînâm.

SANJAYA UVÂCA:

57.1 TATO DURYODHANO dhūṣyâ Bhîmasenaṁ tathâgatam
pratyudhayâv āditâ’îmâ vegaṇa mahâta nadan.
Samâpetatur anyonyam śrîṅiṇu vṛṣabhâv iva
mahâniṅgṛhaṅghoṣâ ca prahârâṇâm ajâyata.
Abhavaca ca tayor yuddhaṁ tumulaṁ lomaḥharṣanam
jigisâtār yath’ ānyonyam Índra-Prahlâdâyor iva.
Rudhir’ékṣitaṁrâv’âṅgau gadâhastau manasvinau
dadrśate mah’ätâmânau puṣpītâv iva kiṃśukau.

57.5 Tâthâ tasmin mahâyuddhâ vartamâne suśārûṇe
khaḍyotâśaṅghâra iva khaṁ darśâniyâm yvarocata.
Tâthâ tasmin vartamâne sâṅkule tumule bhrâm
ubhāv api pariśrâṇau yuddhyamânâv arînḍamau,
Tau mûhûrtam samâśvasya punar eva paraṇîṭapau
abhyaḥhârâyaṁt’ ānyonyâm samprâgrhyâ gade śûbhe.
Tau tu dhūṣyâ mahâvîrâu samâvâstau nara’vṛṣabhâu
Balinau vâraṇau yadvad vâsit’ârthâ mad’ôtktau,
Samâna✈îrâu sampreksya praghâtaṅgâdâv ubhau
Vismayaṁ paramâṇa jagnur devâgangdharâvâmânavâḥ.

57.10 Pragbhâtaṅgâdau dhūṣyâ Duryodhana-Vṛkodaraṁ
Sanjâyâh saraṅbhûrânam vijaye samapadyata.
Samâmânya tato bhûyo bhûrârâu Balinâm varau
Anyonyasyâ āntaraîpresptv pracâkrâte ‘ntaram prati.

296
THE DUEL

Raising his mace, Vrikódara, the heroic son of Pandu, then swiftly charged against the heroic son of Dhrita-rashtra. Elephants trumpeted, horses neighed repeatedly, and the weapons of the Pándavas blazed in their desire for victory.

SÁNJAYA said:

When Dur-yódhana saw Bhima-sena charging forward in this way, he counter-attacked him with great speed, roaring passionately. The two men clashed together like horned bulls and the noise of their blows boomed like a huge thunderstorm. The battle between them was tumultuous and hair-raising—like the battle between Indra and Prahláda—with both men eager to conquer the other. Wielding their maces, the spirited heroes looked like flowering kimbhaka trees as all their limbs became drenched in blood.* During that great and horrific battle, the sky glistened beautifully as if with swarms of fireflies. During that extremely chaotic and tumultuous battle, both enemy-tamers became exhausted from their fighting. But after they had rested a while, the enemy-scorchers once again took up their splendid maces and attacked one another.

Equal in strength, the powerful bull-like men were like mighty elephants intoxicated with passion for a cow on heat. Gods, gandhárvás, and humans all felt extreme wonder as they gazed at the rested men and watched them brandishing their maces. When they saw Dur-yódhana and Vrikódara wielding their maces, every living creature felt unsure as to who would win. Clashing together once more, the two brothers and champions among powerful men attacked each other, eager to find their opponent’s weaknesses.

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* The Sanskrit text includes a reference to a tree, but the specific type is not specified in the translation. 

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297
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Here is a new Clay Sanskrit Library translation of Volume Two (of two) of ‘Shalya,’ Book Nine of the Maha·bhárata.

In one of the most famous sequences in the epic, Dur·yódhana, the heroic but corrupt king of the Káuravas, meets his end when he is dishonorably defeated in combat by his archenemy, Bhima, struck by a mace, below the navel. Their duel poignantly portrays the downfall of a once great fighter in the face of a new order governed by Krishna, in which the warrior code is brushed aside to ensure the predestined triumph of the Pándavas.

The narrative of the mace battle itself frames a lengthy account of the merits of worshiping at sacred sites along the Sarásvati river. Krishna’s brother Bala·rama had departed on his pilgrimage having failed to persuade Krishna not to take sides in the war. Now, again, the ignoble victory of the Pándavas drives him away in disgust.

The uncertainties and ambiguities that pervade the Maha·bhárata are exemplified here in the most flawed of its flawed heroes, King Dur·yódhana, a paradigm of martial strength but so blinded by his pride and arrogance that he brings ruin to his allies and clan.