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Maha·bhárata

Book Ten

Dead of Night

&

Book Eleven

The Women



Translated by
KATE CROSBY

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MAHĀBHĀRATA

BOOK TEN

DEAD OF NIGHT

BOOK ELEVEN

THE WOMEN

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CONTENTS

CSL Conventions	vii	
Introduction	xvii	
MAHA·BHÁRATA X – DEAD OF NIGHT		
1–5	The Owl in the Banyan	5
6–8	Merciless Slaughter	47
9	Balm for Duryódhana	97
10–11	Dráupadi's Demand	111
12–15	The Brink of Apocalypse	127
16–18	Strategies Revealed	151
MAHA·BHÁRATA XI – THE WOMEN		
1–9	Counseling the Ineffectual King	175
10–15	Farewells and Reconciliation	229
16–25	Mothers and Widows in the Carnage	263
26–27	The Funerary Rites	325
Notes	345	
Emendations to the Sanskrit Text	361	
Glossary of Proper Names and Epithets	365	

- 16.1 **E**VAM UKTVĀ TU Gāndhārī Kurūṇām avakartanam
 apaśyat tatra tiṣṭhantī sarvaṃ divyena cakṣuṣā,
 pati|vratā, mahā|bhāgā, samāna|vrata|cāriṇī,
 ugrena tapasā yuktā, satataṃ satya|vādinī,
 vara|dānena Kṛṣṇasya maha”rṣeḥ puṇya|karmaṇaḥ
 divya|jñāna|bal’|ôpetā; vividhaṃ paryadevayat.
 dadarśa sā buddhimatī dūrād api yath” ântike
 raṇ’|ājiraṃ nṛ|vīrāṇām adbhutaṃ, loma|harṣaṇam.
- 16.5 asthi|keśa|vas”|ākīrṇaṃ, śoṇit’|āugha|pariplutam,
 śarīrair bahu|sāhasrair vinikīrṇaṃ samantataḥ,
 gaj’|āśva|ratha|yodhānām āvṛtaṃ rudhir’|āvilaiḥ,
 śarīrair a|śīraskaiś ca, videhaiś ca śīro|gaṇaiḥ,
 gaj’|āśva|nara|nārīṇāṃ niḥ|svanair abhisamvṛtam,
 sṛgāla|baka|kākola|kaṅka|kāka|niṣevitam,
 rakṣasāṃ puruṣ’|ādānāṃ modanaṃ kurar’|ākulam,
 a|śivābhiḥ śivābhiś ca nāditam, gṛdhra|sevitam.
 tato Vyās’|ābhyanujñāto Dhṛtarāṣṭro mahī|patih,
 Pāṇḍu|putrās ca te sarve Yudhiṣṭhira|puro|gamāḥ,
 16.10 Vāsudevaṃ puras|kṛtya, hata|bandhuṃ ca pārthivam,
 Kuru|striyaḥ samāsādyā jagmur āyodhanaṃ prati.
 samāsādyā Kuru|kṣetraṃ tāḥ striyo nihat’|ēśvarāḥ

WHEN SHE HAD finished speaking Gandhári, staying 16.1
 right where she was, surveyed the entire battle field
 of the Kurus with her divine eye, for, in her dedication
 to her husband, she had accrued great merit by perform-
 ing the vow of making herself like him and, endowed with
 such strong religious power and always true to her word,
 she possessed—as a result of the boon granted her by the
 great seer Krishna, performer of purifying rites—the power
 of divine knowledge; the sight excited many cries of an-
 guish from her. For even from that distance that insightful
 woman could see as if close by the awesome and horrifying
 arena of the battle between the champions of mankind.

Bones, hair and sinews lay scattered. Pools of blood had 16.5
 turned the ground to marsh. Thousands of dismembered
 bodies lay strewn all over. The ground was piled up with de-
 capitated torsos and piles of heads detached from their bod-
 ies, from elephants, horses and chariot-fighters, all churned
 up with blood. Darkened under the weight of the sound-
 less corpses of elephants, horses, men and women, the place
 was haunted by jackals, cranes, ravens, herons and crows, a
 playground for man-eating goblins, it teemed with osprey
 and echoed to the ominous cries of jackals; all the while
 vultures gathered.

Then at Vyasa's command, Dhrita-rashtra, the lord of the 16.10
 earth, and all of Pandu's sons with Yudhi-shthira at their
 head, led by Krishna, descendent of Vasu-deva, and prince
 Sátyaki whose relatives had all been slain, set out for the
 battle ground, taking the Kuru women with them. When
 the women, whose men folk had been killed, arrived at

apaśyanta hatāms tatra putrān, bhrātṛn, pitṛn, patīn
 kravý'âdair bhakṣyamāṇān vai gomāyu|bala|vāyasaiḥ,
 bhūtaiḥ, piśācai, rakṣobhir, vividhaiś ca niśā|caraiḥ.
 Rudr'âkrīḍa|nibhaṃ dr̥ṣṭvā tadā viśasanaṃ striyaḥ
 mah"ârhebhyo 'tha yānebhyo vikrośantyo nipetire.
 a|dr̥ṣṭa|pūrvaṃ paśyantyo duḥkh'ârtā Bharata|striyaḥ
 śarīreṣv askhalann anyāḥ, patantyaś c' âparā bhuvi.

16.15 śrāntānāṃ c' âpy a|nāthānāṃ n' āsīt kā cana cetanā.

Pāñcāla|Kuru|yoṣāṇāṃ kṛpaṇaṃ tad abhūn mahat.
 duḥkh'ôpahata|cittābhiḥ samantād anunāditam
 dr̥ṣṭvā yodhanam atyugraṃ dharmajñā Subal'âtmajā
 tataḥ sâ puṇḍarīk'âkṣam āmantrya puruṣ'ôttamam
 Kurūṇāṃ vaiśasaṃ dr̥ṣṭvā idaṃ vacanam abravīt:

«paśý' âitāḥ, puṇḍarīk'âkṣa, snuṣā me nihat'êśvarāḥ
 prakīrṇa|keśāḥ, krośantīḥ kurarīr iva, Mādhaba.

amūs tv abhisamāgamyā smarantyo bhartṛ|jān guṇān,
 pṛthag ev' âbhyadhāvantaḥ putrān, bhrātṛn, pitṛn, patīn.

16.20 vīra|sūbhir, mahā|bāho, hata|putrābhir āvṛtam,

kva cic ca vīra|patnībhir hata|vīrābhir āvṛtam,
 śobhitam puruṣa|vyāghrair Karṇa|Bhīṣm'Âbhimanyubhiḥ,
 Droṇa|Drupada|Śalyaiś ca, jvaladbhir iva pāvakaiḥ;
 kāñcanaīḥ kavacair, niṣkair, maṇibhiś ca mah"âtmanām,

Kuru-kshetra, the battle field of the Kurus, they saw before them their slain sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands, being eaten by flesh-eating creatures: packs of wolves, crows, ghosts, goblins and trolls, and a host of other scavengers of the night. At the sight of that carnage, the vision of wrathful Shiva's sport, the women threw themselves down from their costly carriages, screeching. Agonized by the torment of seeing such unprecedented horror, some of the women of Bhárata's line lost all the strength in their bodies, others fell to the ground.

Exhausted and bereft of the men who kept them safe, 16.15
 their minds became numb. The plight of the Panchála and Kuru women was deeply pitiable. When she saw the frightful battle site, filled on every side with the clamor of these women, their hearts rent in anguish, Gandhári, daughter of Súbala, who understood Dharma, addressed the most exalted of men, the lotus-eyed lord, and, in response to seeing the slaughter the Kurus had met, made this speech to him:

“Lotus-eyed lord of the Mádhava clan, look at my daughters-in-law here. The men of their families are slain. Their hair hangs loose and they screech like osprey. Though they arrived here all as a group, recollecting all the good things about their husbands, it is alone that each now runs to son, brother, father or husband.

Everywhere you look is draped with women who brought 16.20
 heroes into the world, but lost sons; who had champions for husbands, but lost their champions, strong-armed lord. The entire arena is draped in those tigers of men, Karna, Bhishma and Abhimányu; and with Drona, Drúpada and

aṅgadair, hasta|keyūraiḥ, sragbhiś ca samalamkṛtam,
vīra|bāhu|visr̥ṣṭābhiḥ śaktibhiḥ, parighair api,
khaḍgaiś ca vimalais tīkṣṇaiḥ, sa|śaraiś ca śar'āsanaiḥ,
kravy'āda|saṃghair muditais tiṣṭhadbhiḥ sahitaiḥ kva cit,
kva cid ākrīḍamānaiś ca, śayānair aparaiḥ kva cit.

16.25 etad evaṃ|vidhaṃ, vīra, saṃpaśy' āyodhanaṃ, vibho.

paśyamānā ca dahyāmi śoken' āhaṃ, jan'|ārdana.
Pāñcālānāṃ Kurūṇāṃ ca vināśe, Madhu|sūdana,
pañcānāṃ api bhūtānāṃ n' āhaṃ vadham acintayam.
tān suparṇāś ca gṛdhrāś ca karṣayanty asṛg|ukṣitāḥ.
nigr̥hya caraṇair gṛdhrā bhakṣayanti sahasraśaḥ.
Jayadrathasya, Karṇasya, tath' āiva Droṇa|Bhīṣmayoḥ,
Abhimanyor vināśaṃ ca kaś cintayitum arhati?
a|vadhya|kalpān nihatān, gata|sattvān, a|cetasāḥ,
gṛdhra|kañka|baṭa|śyena|śva|sṛgāl'|ādanī|kṛtān,

16.30 a|marṣa|vaśam āpannān, Duryodhana|vaśe sthitān

paśy' êmān puruṣa|vyāghrān, saṃśāntān pāvakān iva.
śayānā ye purā sarve mṛdūni śayanāni ca,
vipannās te 'dya vasudhāṃ vivṛtām adhiśerate.
bandibhiḥ satataṃ kāle stuvadbhir abhinanditāḥ,
śivānām a|śivā ghorāḥ śṛṇvanti vividhā girāḥ.

Shalya, who gleam like fire; festooned with gleaming armor, chest-plates and gems from the noble warriors; and embellished with their garlands and the jewelry that had adorned their arms and hands, as well as with the lances and iron-tipped clubs hurled by the arms of champions, with lustrous razor-sharp swords and bows, their arrows still in place. Here and there flesh-eating animals linger in groups enjoying themselves; in some places they even frolic, while elsewhere others lie relaxing.

Look here at the battle field in this state, powerful champion. As I look upon it, I am consumed by grief, O rouser of the people. Slayer of the demon Madhu, for me the destruction of the Panchálas and Kurus was as unthinkable as killing the five elements that make up the world. Eagles and vultures, wet with blood, yank them apart. Grasping them with their talons, the vultures gobble them in a thousand pieces. Who could have thought that Jayad-ratha and Karna, or Drona and Bhishma, or Abhimányu for that matter, could have been destroyed? Those who were slain, now lifeless and unconscious, did not deserve to die, to be made food for the vultures; for the herons and cranes; for the hyenas, the dogs and the jackals; they fell foul of the power of antagonism, under Duryódhana's sway. See those tigers of men snuffed out like flames. Those who used to sleep on soft beds now lie exposed, distorted, on the bare ground. Once bards constantly delighted them with timely eulogies; now they hear the blood-curdling, ill-omened sounds of jackals giving tongue.

ye purā śerate vīrāḥ śayaneṣu yaśasvinaḥ,
candan'āguru|digdh'āṅgās, te 'dya pāmsuṣu śerate.
teṣām ābharaṇāny ete gr̥dhra|gomāyu|vāyasāḥ.
ākṣipanti śivā ghorā vinadantyaḥ† punaḥ punaḥ.

16.35 bāṇān viniśītān, pītān nistriṃśān, vimalā gadāḥ
yuddh'ābhīmāninaḥ sarve jīvanta iva bibhrati.
su|rūpa|varṇā bahavaḥ kravy'ādair avaghaṭṭitāḥ
ṛṣabha|pratirūpās śerate harita|srajaḥ.
apare punar āliṅgya gadāḥ parigha|bāhavaḥ
śerate 'bhimukhāḥ sūrā, dayitā iva yoṣitāḥ.
bibhrataḥ kavacāny anye, vimalāny āyudhāni ca,
na dharṣayanti kravy'ādā, «jīvant'» īti, Jan'ārdana.
kravy'ādaiḥ kṛṣyamāṇānām apareṣāṃ mah'ātmanām
śātakaumbhyaḥ srajaś citrā viprakīrṇāḥ samantataḥ.

16.40 ete gomāyavo bhīmā nihātānāṃ yaśasvinām
kaṇṭh'āntara|gatān hārān ākṣipanti sahasraśaḥ.
sarveṣv apara|rātreṣu yān anandanta bandinaḥ
stutibhiś ca par'ārdhyābhir upacāraiś ca śikṣitāḥ,
tān imāḥ paridevanti duḥkh'ārtāḥ param'āṅganāḥ
kṛpaṇaṃ, Vṛṣṇi|śārdūla, duḥkha|śok'ārditā bhṛṣam.
rakt'ōtpala|vanān' īva vibhānti rucirāṇi ca
mukhāni parama|strīṇāṃ pariśuṣkāṇi, Keśava.
ruditād viratā hy etā, dhyāyantyaḥ sa|paricchadāḥ
Kuru|striyo 'bhigacchanti tena ten' āiva duḥkhitāḥ.

Before these glorious champions lay on beds, their bodies daubed with sandal paste and aloe. Now they lie in the dust. For adornment they have these vultures and wolves and ravens. She-jackals pull at them, crying out again and again.

Each man who took such pride in fighting still holds his pointed arrows, dressed sword or gleaming mace, as if he were still alive. Many are the handsome, fair-complexioned men now dragged apart by carrion, as they lie like bulls, draped in verdant garlands. Some warriors, their arms like iron rods, still cling to their maces, and lie turned towards them, as if toward their beloved women. Others wear spotless armor and weapons, rouser of the people. The scavengers do not touch them, thinking they are still alive. Other of the noble warriors lose their resplendent golden necklaces, as they are dragged about by scavengers, which end up scattered all around. 16.35

See how as the fearsome wolves snatch the strings of pearls that lay around the throats of the glorious soldiers now slain, the strings explode in a thousand directions. Well-versed bards once delighted them during the last watch each night with eulogies and top-notch entertainments. Now it is these beautiful ladies, distraught with grief, who sing to them in lament, tiger of the Vrishni clan, most pitifully oppressed by their anguish and grief. Though drawn with grief, the noble ladies' faces are radiant, long-haired lord, and look like clusters of red lotuses. Now they have stopped weeping and, lost in thought, the Kuru women go here and there in anguish, their attendants trailing after them. 16.40

- 16.45 etāny āditya|varṇāni, tapanīya|nibhāni ca,
 roṣa|rodana|tāmraṇi vaktrāṇi Kuru|yoṣitām.
 śyāmānām, vara|varṇānām, gauriṇām, eka|vāsasām
 Duryodhana|vara|strīṇām paśya vṛndāni, keśava.
 āsām a|paripūrṇ' |ârthaṃ niśamya paridevitam
 itar' |êtara|saṃkrandān na vijānanti yoṣitaḥ.
 etā dīrgham iv' ōcchvasya, vikruśya ca, vilapya ca,
 viṣpandamānā duḥkhena vīrā jahati jīvitam.
 bahvyo dṛṣṭvā śarīrāṇi krośanti vilapanti ca,
 pāṇibhiś c' âparā ghnanti śīrāṃsi mṛdu|pāṇayah.
- 16.50 śīrobhiḥ patitair, hastaiḥ, sarv' |âṅgair yūthaśaḥ kṛtaiḥ,
 itar' |êtara|saṃpṛktair âkīrṇā bhāti medinī.
 viśīraskān atho kāyān dṛṣṭvā hy etān a|ninditān
 muhyanty anugatā nāryo videhāni śīrāṃsi ca.
 śiraḥ kāyena saṃdhāya prekṣamāṇā vicetasāḥ
 a|paśyantyo param tatra, «n' êdam asy'» êti duḥkhitāḥ.
 bāh' |ūru|caraṇān anyān viśikh' |ônmathitān pṛthak
 saṃdadhatyo ' |sukh' |âviṣṭā mūrchanty etāḥ punaḥ punaḥ.
 utkṛtta|śīrasas' † c' ânyān vijagdhān mṛga|pakṣibhiḥ
 dṛṣṭvā kās cin na jānanti bhartṛn Bharata|yoṣitaḥ.
- 16.55 pāṇibhiś c' âparā ghnanti śīrāṃsi, Madhu|sūdana,
 prekṣya bhrātṛn pitṛn putrān patīṃś ca nihatān paraiḥ.
 bāhubhiś ca sa|khaḍgaiś ca, śīrobhiś ca sa|kuṇḍalaiḥ
 a|gamyā|kalpā pṛthivī māṃsa|śoṇita|kardamā
 babhūva, Bharata|śreṣṭha, prāṇibhir gata|jīvitaiḥ.
 na duḥkheṣ' ūcitāḥ pūrvam duḥkham gāhanty a|ninditāḥ.
 bhrātṛbhiḥ, † patibhiḥ, putrair upākīrṇā vasuṃ|dharā.

Red as the hue of the sun or like soft copper are the 16.45
 faces of the Kuru wives, from anger and from weeping. See
 the clusters of Duryódhana's wives and girls, dark and fair,
 long-haired lord. Hearing each other's lamentations, which
 make little sense, his women can make no sense of the re-
 sulting cacophony. Some of these valiant women, heaving
 deep sighs, crying out, wailing and shuddering, respond to
 their torment by taking their own lives. Many, when they
 see the corpses, scream and wail. Others beat their soft-
 skinned hands against their heads.

The fat earth glistens, strewn with severed heads, hands 16.50
 and every other limb, forming heaps all jumbled together.
 Finding here familiar torsos, beyond reproof, now decap-
 itated, and heads severed from their bodies, women lose
 consciousness. Placing a head with a torso, they look at
 them, confused, realizing to their distress, "This is not his"
 but are not able to find another one in its place. Piec-
 ing together one by one the various arms, thighs and feet
 torn apart by shafts, they faint time and time again, over-
 whelmed by misery. Some of the Bhárata women, seeing
 still other decapitated bodies mauled by beasts and birds,
 do not recognize them as their husbands.

Others, at seeing their brothers, fathers, sons and hus- 16.55
 bands all slain by their enemies, slayer of demon Madhu,
 strike their heads with their hands. With arms still clutch-
 ing their swords, and heads still wearing their earrings, the
 ground has become impassable, a mire of flesh and blood,
 awash with lifeless bodies, most exalted of Bhárata's line.
 Those innocent women, unaccustomed to any hardship be-
 fore, are now steeped in misery. The earth is strewn with