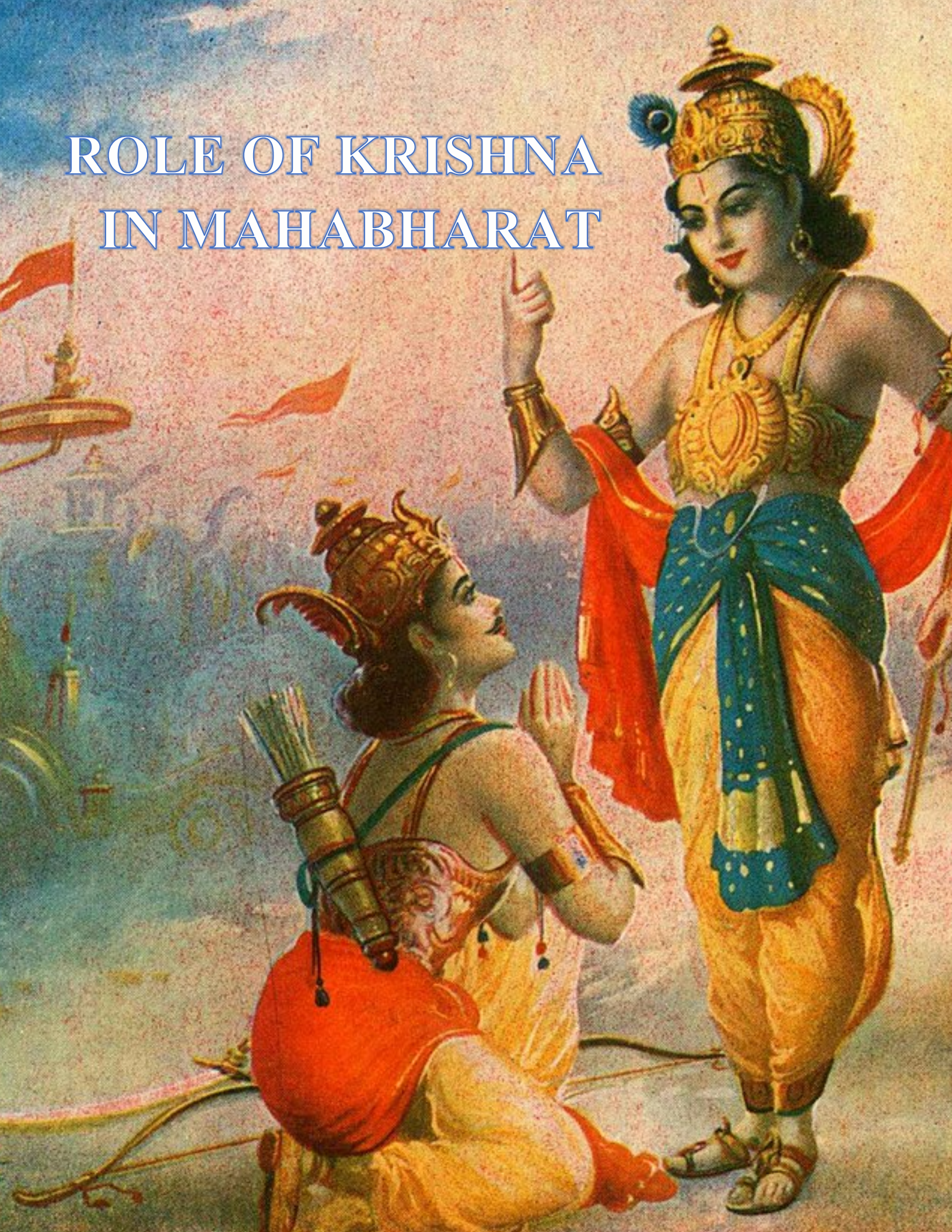


ROLE OF KRISHNA IN MAHABHARAT



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Thanking you,
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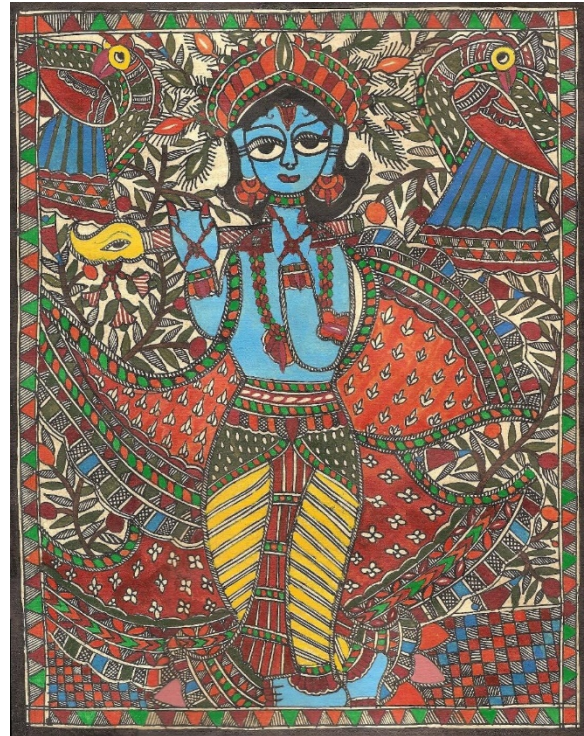
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Introduction

Krishna is a major deity in Hinduism. He is worshipped as the eighth avatar of Vishnu and also as the supreme God in his own right. He is the god of compassion, tenderness, love and is one of the most popular and widely revered among Indian divinities. Krishna's birthday is celebrated every year by Hindus on Krishna Janmashtami according to the lunisolar Hindu calendar, which falls in late August or early September of the Gregorian calendar.

The anecdotes and narratives of Krishna's life are generally titled as Krishna Leela. He is a central character in the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata Purana and the Bhagavad Gita, and is mentioned in many Hindu philosophical, theological, and mythological texts. They portray him in various perspectives: a god-child, a prankster, a model lover, a divine hero, and as the universal supreme being. His iconography reflects these legends, and shows him in different stages of his life, such as an infant eating butter, a young boy playing a flute, a young boy with Radha or surrounded by women devotees, or a friendly charioteer giving counsel to Arjuna.



The synonyms of Krishna have been traced to 1st millennium BCE literature. In some sub-traditions, Krishna is worshipped as Svayam Bhagavan, and this is sometimes referred to as Krishnaism. These sub-traditions arose in the context of the medieval era Bhakti movement. Krishna-related literature has inspired numerous performance arts such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Odissi, and Manipuri dance. He is a pan-Hindu god, but is particularly revered in some locations such as Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, Dwarka and Junagadh in Gujarat; the Jagannatha aspect in Odisha, Mayapur in West Bengal; in the form of Vithoba in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, Shrinathji at Nathdwara in Rajasthan, Udupi Krishna in Karnataka, Parthasarathy in Tamil Nadu and Guruvayoorappan in Guruvayoor in Kerala. Since the 1960s, the worship of Krishna has also spread to the Western world and to Africa, largely due to the work of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

Adulthood of Krishna

Krishna legends then describe his return to Mathura. He overthrows and kills the tyrant king, his uncle Kamsa/Kansa after quelling several assassination attempts by Kamsa. He reinstates Kamsa's father, Ugrasena as the king of the Yadavas and becomes a leading prince at the court. In one version of the Krishna story, as narrated by Shanta Rao, Krishna after Kamsa's death leads the Yadavas to the newly built city of Dwaraka. Thereafter Pandavas rise. Krishna befriends Arjuna and the other Pandava princes of the Kuru kingdom. Krishna plays a key role in the Mahabharata.



The Bhagavata Purana describes eight wives of Krishna that appear in sequence as (Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Kalindi, Mitravinda, Nagnajiti (also called Satya), Bhadra and Lakshmana (also called Madra). According to Dennis Hudson, this is a metaphor where each of the eight wives signifies a different aspect of him. According to George Williams, Vaishnava texts mention all Gopis as wives of Krishna, but this is spiritual symbolism of devotional relationship and Krishna's complete loving devotion to each and every one devoted to him.

In Krishna-related Hindu traditions, he is most commonly seen with Radha. All of his wives and his lover Radha are considered in the Hindu tradition to be the avatars of the goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. Gopis are considered as Lakshmi's or Radha's manifestations.

Krishna as a political reformer

Krishna was the key political figure in overthrowing Kansa, the king of Surasena Kingdom. The kingdom of Shurasena was the native kingdom of Yadava clans constituted by the Andhakas, Vrishnis, and Bhojas. By overthrowing Kansa, Krishna re-established the old king Ugrasena on the throne and stabilized the kingdom from collapse due to factional fighting within the kingdom.

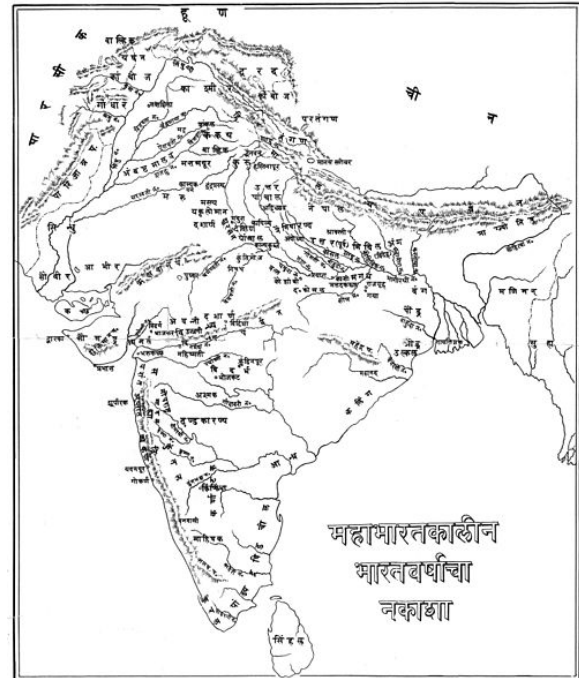
The next threat came from outside the country, from the Magadha Kingdom. The ruler of Magadha, Jarasandha, attacked Surasena many times and weakened its military. Krishna and other Yadava chiefs all tried their best to hold on. At last, they had to flee from their native kingdom to the south and to the west.

Later, with the initiative of Krishna, the Yadavas who fled from Surasena formed a new kingdom called Dwaraka. Its capital was Dwaravati, a city well protected by mountains on all sides, on an island, not far from the Gujarat coast. This made it immune to attacks from land. The kingdom prospered by sea trade with seafaring kingdoms.

Krishna also established an alliance of Yadavas with the Pandavas, a faction of Kurus, who were fighting against the established Kuru Kingdom. This alliance also benefited the Yadavas, strategically. With the help of the Pandavas, they overthrew the Magadha king Jarasandha who was their biggest enemy.

Krishna in turn helped the Pandavas to win the Kurukshetra War against the Kurus headed by Duryodhana. Thus the rule of the Pandava Yudhishtira was re-established by Krishna at Indraprastha, the modern-day Delhi.

However, The Yadava chiefs fought the Kurukshetra War, on both sides, and even after the war ended, the enmity among the Yadava leaders continued. After 36 years, since the Kurukshetra War, another war broke among the Yadavas, in their own kingdom. This resulted in the absolute destruction of the Yadava kingdom in



Dwaraka, with Balarama and Krishna also departing due to grief. This fight among Yadava is also attributed to a curse from Gandhari, mother of Duryodhana to Krishna.

But the help Krishna extended to the Pandava Yudhishtira, paid off. When the rule of Yudhishtira ended, he established the Yadava prince Vajra on the throne of Indraprastha along with the Kuru prince Parikshit, at Hastinapura. Thus the royal lineage of the Yadavas continued through Aniruddha's son, Prince Vajra, greatgrandson of Krishna and grandson of Pradhyumna. Parikshit was the son of Abhimanyu and the grandson of Arjuna. Late Sri. Kulapati K.M.Munshi's famous narration of the life of Lord Krishna, Krishnavatara (Volumes 1 to 8) published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is a very good read into the political aspects of Lord Krishna, painting Krishna not as the God Almighty but as a human Hero and a Great Leader. A very interesting read between the lines into the inner aspects of politics by Krishna as a human being.

Preparation for the Kurukshetra War

(Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 5) As we are desirous of adopting a political course, this is, no doubt, our first duty; a man acting otherwise would be a great fool. But our relationship to both the Kurus and the Pandus is equal, howsoever these two parties may behave with each other. If that chief of the Kuru race should make peace on equitable terms, then the brotherly feelings between the Kurus and the Pandus will sustain no injury. If on the other hand, the son of Dhritarashtra should wax haughty and from folly refuse to make peace, then having summoned others, summon us too. The holder of Gadiva then will be fired with wrath and the dull-headed and wicked Duryodhana, with his partisans and friends that will meet his fate.



Offer of aid in a war for both Arjuna and Duryodhana

(Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 7) There is a large body of cowherds numbering ten lakhs, rivaling me in strength and known as the Narayanas, all of whom are able to fight in the thick of battle. These soldiers, irresistible in battle, shall be sent to one of you and I alone, resolved not to fight on the field, and laying down my arms, will go to the other. You may, first, select whichever of these two commends itself to you.

Peace Mission to prevent the Kurukshetra War

(Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 83) I will go to King Dhritarashtra, desirous of accomplishing what is consistent with righteousness, which may be beneficial to us, and what also is for the good of the Kurus.

Politics within the Yadava Chiefs

(Mahabharata, Book 12, Chapter 80) I never behave with slavish obsequiousness towards my kinsmen by flattering speeches about their prosperity. I give them half of what I have and forgive their evil speeches. As a fire-stick is ground by a person desirous of obtaining fire, even so, my heart is ground by my kinsmen with their cruel speeches. Indeed, those cruel speeches burn my

heart every day. Might reside in Sankarshana (Balarama); mildness in Gada; and as regards Pradyumna, he surpasses even me in the beauty of a person. Although I have all these on my side yet I am helpless. Many others among the Andhakas and the Vrishnis are possessed of great prosperity and might and daring courage and constant perseverance. He on whose side they do not range themselves meets with destruction. He, on the other hand, on whose side they do range themselves, achieves everything. Dissuaded (in turns) by both (viz., Ahuka and Akrura,) I do not side with either of them. What can be more painful for a person than to have both Ahuka and Akrura on his side? What, again, can be more painful for one than not to have both of them on his side I am like the mother of two brothers gambling against each other, invoking victory to both. I am thus, afflicted by both.

Conquest of Eastern Kingdoms of Pragjyotisha and Shontipura

The epic Mahabharata describes many battles fought by Krishna and his conquest of various kingdoms. He defeated the king Naraka of Pragjyotisha the modern-day Guwahati, in Assam state of India. He was known as Bhumi-putra (the son of the Earth) belonging to the Bhauma clan of kings. His kingdom was called Kamarupa.

He also conquered Bana or Vana of Shonitapura (Shonitpur of Assam), to the east of Pragjyotisha. However, they became allies, as Krishna's grandson Aniruddha married Usha, the daughter of Bana. He belonged to the Daitya clan of Asuras.

In (Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 62), Krishna is described as the slayer of Vana and Bhumi's son (Naraka)

(Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 130) He hath slain Jarasandha, and Vakra, and Shishupala of mighty energy, and Vana in battle and numerous other kings also have been slain by him. Of immeasurable might, he vanquished king Varuna and also Pavaka and Indra and Madhu and Kaitabha and Hayagriva.

Conquest of Vidarbha, Gandhara and Pandya

Krishna married Rukmini, his first wife, by abducting her on her request from the Vidarbha Kingdom, defeating her brother Rukmi. He also won a contest and married a Gandhara princess, Satya, in the same manner. Krishna also attacked and conquered the Pandya Kingdom in the south.

(Mahabharata, Book 5, Chapter 48)...that Vasudeva (Krishna), viz., who had mowed down in battle by main force all the royal warriors of the Bhoja race, had carried off on a single car Rukmini of great fame for making her his wife.

(Mahabharata, Book 7, Chapter 11) Krishna, vanquishing all the kings at a self-choice, bore away the daughter of the king of the Gandharas. Those angry kings, as if they were horses by birth, were yoked unto his nuptial car and were lacerated with the whip. The contest at swyamvara was chaining a set of bulls to plow.

(Mahabharata, Book 7, Chapter 23) The Pandya King Sarangadhwaja's country having been invaded and his kinsmen having fled, his father had been slain by Krishna in battle. Obtaining weapons then from Bhishma and Drona, Rama and Kripa, prince Sarangadhwaja became, in

weapons, the equal of Rukmi and Karna and Arjuna and Achyuta. He then desired to destroy the city of Dwaraka and subjugate the whole world. Wise friends, however, from a desire of doing him good, counseled him against that course. Giving up all thoughts of revenge, he ruled his own dominions.

Krishna as a Philosopher

Krishna's philosophical conversation with his friend and cousin Arjuna during the Kurukshetra War later became known as the famous Bhagavad Gita, the holy book of Hindus. How he amassed this great knowledge is revealed in the Anugita chapters of Mahabharata, which states that he got this knowledge by interactions with many learned men, and by his own meditations.

The following was what Krishna told to Arjuna when later told to repeat what he discoursed as Bhagavat Gita, in the midst of the Kurukshetra War.



(Mahabharata, Book 14, Chapter 16) I made thee listen to truths that are regarded as mysteries. I imparted to thee truths that are eternal. Verily, I discoursed to thee on Religion in its true form and on all the eternal regions. It is exceedingly disagreeable to me to learn that thou didst not, from folly, receive what I imparted. The recollection of all that I told thee on that occasion will not come to me now. Without doubt, O son of Pandu, thou art destitute of faith and thy understanding is not good. It is impossible for me, O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), to repeat, in detail, all that I said on that occasion. That

religion about which I discoursed to thee then is more than sufficient for understanding Brahma. I cannot discourse on it again in detail. I discoursed to thee on Supreme Brahma, having concentrated in Yoga.

The probable source of Krishna's Knowledge

Krishna mentions the knowledge he obtained from a certain Brahmana

(Mahabharata, Book 14, Chapter 16) On one occasion, a Brahmana came to us. Of irresistible energy, he came from the regions of the Grandsire. He was duly revered by us. Listen to what he said, in answer to our inquiries. The Brahmana said, "That which you asked me, O Krishna, connected with the religion of Moksha (Emancipation), led by your compassion for all creatures and not for your own good,--that indeed, which destroys all delusion, O you that art possessed of supreme puissance I shall now tell you duly. Do you listen with concentrated attention as I discourse to you?" This inquiring is Krishna's Leela. This is also mentioned in the Chhandogya Upanishad.

Extracts from Bhagavat Gita the Philosophy of Krishna

(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 26) There is no objective existence of anything that is distinct from the soul; nor non-existence of anything possessing the virtues of the soul. This conclusion in respect of both these hath been arrived at by those that know the truths of things. Know that the soul to be immortal by which all this [universe] is pervaded. No one can compass the destruction of that which is imperishable. It has been said that those bodies of the Embodied soul which is eternal, indestructible, and infinite, have an end.

(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 26) As a man, casting off robes that are worn out, putteth on others that are new, so the Embodied (soul), casting off bodies that are worn out, entereth other bodies that are new. Weapons cleave it not, fire consumeth it not; the waters do not drench it, nor doth the wind waste it. It is incapable of being cut, burnt, drenched, or dried up. It is unchangeable, all-pervading, stable, firm, and eternal. It is said to be imperceivable, inconceivable, and unchangeable.



(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 26) All beings (before birth) were unmanifest. Only during an interval (between birth and death), O Bharata, are they manifest; and then again, when death comes, they become (once more) unmanifest.

(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 27) In this world, two kinds of devotion; that of the Sankhyas through knowledge and that of the yogins through work.

(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 29) Arjuna said,—Thou applaudest, O Krishna, the abandonment of actions, and again the application (to them). Tell me definitely which one of these two is superior. The Holy One said—Both abandonment of actions and application to actions lead to emancipation. But of these, application to action is superior to abandonment. He should always be known to be an ascetic who hath no aversion nor desire. For, being free from pairs of opposites, he is easily released from the bonds of action.

(Mahabharata, Book 6, Chapter 29) He who is wise never taketh pleasure in these that have a beginning and an end.

Evidence of early worship of Krishna's Personality

The cult of Krishna Vasudeva (IAST *kṛṣṇa vāsudeva* "Krishna, son of Vasudeva") is historically one of the earliest forms of worship in Krishnaism and Vaishnavism. This tradition is considered separately to other traditions that led to amalgamation at a later stage of the historical development,



that form the basis of the current tradition of the monotheistic religion of Krishna. Some early scholars would equate it with Bhagavatism, and the founder of this religious tradition is believed to be Krishna, who is the son of Vasudeva, thus his name is Vāsudeva, and according to them his followers called themselves Bhagavatas and this

religion had formed by the 2nd century BC (the time of Patanjali), or as early as the 4th century BC according to evidence of Pāṇini and that of Megasthenes and in the Arthashastra of Kautilya, when Vāsudeva was worshiped as supreme Deity in a strongly monotheistic format, where the Supreme Being was perfect, eternal and full of grace. In many sources outside of the cult, devotee or bhakta is defined as Vāsudevaka. Harivamsa, a later addition to Mahabharata as well as Bhagavata purana speak about his childhood in the village of Vrindavana, where Krishna passed his childhood and teenage days.

Learning Outcome

The epic narrative of Mahabharata had been written ages ago. Yet the legendary tale continues to find prominence in every form of art, and continues to overwhelm us even today.

The fact that the epic is still revered is not only because of its poetic grandeur. The stories that almost all of us have grown up with hold relevance even during present times. The deeply philosophical ideas that perpetuate throughout the epic have a lot to teach us about the art of living.

Mahabharata may revolve around the war of duty. But we cannot escape the fact that the major reason behind the destruction of all was revenge. The Kauravas lost everything to their blinded desire to ruin the Pandavas. The war did not even spare the children, including Draupadi's five sons and Abhimanyu.

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The friendship between Krishna and Arjuna is something all of us look up to. It is perhaps because of Krishna's unconditional support and motivation that the Pandavas managed to survive the war. None of us can forget the epic dice scene where it was Krishna who came to Draupadi's rescue while her husbands gambled her away to disgrace. The friendship between Karna and Duryodhan, on the other hand, is no less inspiring.

Arjuna's son Abhimanyu teaches us how half-knowledge can have an adverse impact. While Abhimanyu knew how to enter the Chakravyuh, he did not know the way out.

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