

THE
KURUKSHETRA

of Rāmdhārī Singh Dinkar

Translated by

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Dinkar's *Kurukshetra*

Can a poem written in 1946 in India have a message at the end of the 20th century? The poet (1909-1974) spent his youth in a period of anti-British struggle and Indian nationalism and was 31 years old at the beginning of World War II. He published his first poem in Hindi at the age of 19 and completed *Kurukshetra* at the age of 35: a penetrating search for the meaning of war. One of the striking features of this beautiful poem is that the poet does not deal with the trauma of World War II by using the cliché opposition between the good and the bad ones of war movies. In a very Hindu way he goes back to the most ancient roots of Indian civilization, the *Mahābhārat* epic. This illustrates that we can understand the Hindu mind only if we go back to its earliest myths, because that is the way a Hindu himself finds his deepest identity. Many problems of modern times were dealt with in the past and with the distance of three millennia the answers become more relevant.

For both its philosophical content and the exquisite use of the Hindi language with its extremely varied (Sanskrit) vocabulary, Dinkar's *Kurukshetra* is a mature achievement. Of course, there were antecedents and we enumerate here only the most important poetical creations of Dinkar. Many elements in these poems come to a mature unity in *Kurukshetra*.

In 1935, when the revolt against the British was growing to a peak, he published *Renukā*, in which he dreams of bringing equality and happiness in a world of injustice. If in this poem Dinkar weeps for the sad situation of his country, he stands up to revolt in *Hunkār* (1938), giving intellectual and artistic support to the anti-British movement. A totally different poet then wrote *Rasvanti* (1940), which overflows with romantic feelings of love, for women and for nature. In *Dvandvagīt* (1940) he goes in search of the Ultimate, the Creator of all that exists, probing into the questions of life and death and into the meaning of life that lasts only for a few seconds in view of eternity. If, he asks, only life and the soul are real, why do we chase after dreams?

In *Samdheni* (1946) we find the first traces of the fundamental problem dealt with in *Kurukshetra*, especially in one poem in this collection, entitled 'The victory of Kalinga': after conquering Orissa emperor

Ashoka (3rd ce. BC) is overwhelmed with grief seeing all the suffering he caused, in the way Yudhisthir, the hero of Kurukshetra, is overwhelmed with grief after the Mahābhārat war. The problem of war, the poet will suggest in *Kurukshetra*, is the root of all problems in the world; it has to do with man's deepest nature, of aggression and of compromise.

It should not surprise us that the poet himself admitted that the drama performances around an epic theme (*lila*) in his childhood had a great influence on him. A further important influence is his reading of Indian and British poetry and philosophy. The ideas of the thirties that found their way in the writings of Bertrand Russell especially are clearly found in the thoughts expressed in *Kurukshetra*. Expressions like 'we know too much and feel too little', or 'in regard to what is important we are passive, where we are active it is over trivialities' are echoed in

Only the intellect has grown without fetters,
the land of feelings is left far behind. (p. 70)

Or, when Russell predicts an anti-scientific movement, we read in *Kurukshetra*:

Beware, man! If your science becomes a sword
throw it away, leave all attachments. (p. 74)

Similarly, "in view of existing inequalities, lawbreaking becomes a duty" of Russell becomes one of the main themes of *Kurukshetra*.

Accepting such peace is defeating humanity,
a disregard of God, the end of the bold,
a crime of man, the death of mankind.
Here only revolution is justified. (p. 32)

L.M. Tilak is another important influence on Dinkar, especially with his emphasis on *karma-yoga* or the 'need to act', and not just to sit back when faced with injustice.

The whole earth is a field of action,
as long as the body of man exists.
Duty will prevail
in every atom of life. (p. 97)

In his *Gita-rahasya* Lokmanya Tilak wrote that nothing is good or bad in itself, and in *Kurukshetra* we read:

Vain are your considerations about
war being a sin or a virtue.
There is no act on earth
which by itself is sinful or virtuous. (p. 19)

Discarding all wrong interpretations of the *karma*-theory Dinkar suggests that man has to take his fate in his own hands.

As long as reasonable happiness
is not available to all,
where can relief be on this earth,
how can peace come in this world? (p. 80)

Only idle men wait
for the dictate of Brahma.
The valiant erase the evil written on their faces
with the sweat of their brow. (p. 82)

On the basis of such expressions some critics have called Dinkar a Marxist, or one who preaches revolution in order to destroy the established authority that is corrupt. At the same time, however, Dinkar favours royal authority, if it is a moral authority.

A king is needed, for men
will fight among themselves.
A sword is needed, for men
are not afraid of justice.
Men need a king, who can
understand their stupidity,
who always sprinkles
water on their burning disputes. (p. 89; see, however, also p. 91)

In very strong terms he opposes the idea that *bhagya* or 'deeds from previous births' determines our fate. The rich, he says, have preached *bhagyavad* in order to justify their oppression of the poor; it was a tool in their hands.

Fatalism is the cover of sin,
a weapon of exploitation
to suppress and rob

what belongs to another. (p. 82)

In reality the strength of the muscle is man's *bhagya*. Nobody becomes king or slave through *bhagya*

. The brutal law of action is the root of life:

There would be no king and no subject,
but only human beings.
No writ or fortune on the face,
only hands that work. (p. 84)

Flight into solitude is not an ideal of the active man:

Yudhisthir! Renunciation is not
the path of the brave man.
Where a man walks is the earth,
and not the sky. (p. 97)

Yudhisthir! The search for asceticism
is cowardice of the mind.
Real humanity is loosening
the bondage of life. (p. 91)

Although Dinkar stands in the old Indian tradition of non-violence (*ahimsa*), he proposes that violence becomes a duty when inequality is too great:

Who can win a physical battle
only with the help of moral strength?
That is of no use,
when brutality raises its sword. (p. 22)

Contents of *Kurukshetra*

Kurukshetra is written in the form of a dialogue, between the victorious leader of the Pāṇḍav brothers, Yudhisthir, and his great granduncle Bhīṣma, who had chosen to be the advisor of the opponents, the Kaurav brothers who were defeated. Dinkar himself wrote that he could have written this dialogue even without referring to the context or the characters of the *Mahābhārat* epic. The problem of war is more universal than the context of the epic; it encompasses mankind in its total history. When the dialogue starts the war is over, most heroes have died, on both sides. Cousins and allies have killed each other in a

fierce battle. Yudhisthir has survived and overlooks the battlefield, wondering whether the victory is worth all the suffering.

In *Canto One* the topic of the poem is formulated: the problem of war and its solution. The poet states that probably nobody wants to be involved in war, if it were not for the selfish manipulations by corrupt leaders who want people to go to war:

The origin of the treacherous fire full of hatred
cannot be traced in the heart of universal man.
People never want to fight.
Poisonous flames through the breath
of individuals spread. (p. 9)

The only result, after victory, is that truth weeps:

it laments on the pages of history
and throws scornful looks
at the name of the victorious man. (p. 10)

In *Canto Two* we see how Yudhisthir is overcome with grief and comes to Bhīshma who is dying, pierced with arrows. Yudhisthir touches his feet and weeps about the devastation brought about by the war he thinks he caused. A war that is totally meaningless and leaves Yudhisthir with only two options: either go to the forest and repent about his sins, or commit suicide. He wonders, however, whether he will be able to find peace in the forest, with the memories of the war haunting him.

Bhīshma compares man in society with a hot summer: as temperature rises and a frightening storm has to break out, so is war unavoidable when evil grows in society. No sick person enjoys taking bitter medicines, but he has to if he wants to be cured. Besides, says Bhīshma, good and evil cannot be clearly distinguished. Detachment is an ideal, but when it allows evil to continue to exist, it is wrong. Violence is wrong indeed but at times it is necessary in order to protect truth:

If someone takes your freedom, you sin if
you rely on renunciation and meditation.
It is virtuous to smash the force
which stretches its hands towards you. (p. 20)

It's a waste to grieve or lament

for that which is inevitable.
 If you don't fight or make others fight
 this fire will flare up for any reason. (p. 21).

Mental power is allright for ascetics, but sometimes military strength alone will do:

Pity, forgiveness, sacrifice and meditation
 make the mind of a man sublime,
 but when blood-thirsty beasts surround him,
 only a strong arm can rescue him. (p. 22)

In *Canto Three* Bhīshma addresses the two problems --of war and of peace-- raised by Yudhisthir, who confesses his guilt in bringing about the Mahābhārat war: "War cannot be avoided, Yudhisthir, you did not start this war. It is the necessary reaction against evil growing in society. Peace is artificial if it covers up injustice and oppression of the poor. Justice is the primary condition for peace":

I agree, Yudhisthir, war is a curse,
 but, tell me what is that peace
 that resting on injustice
 looks innocent and simple? (p. 24)

There will be no peace on earth
 if happeness is not equal for all. (p. 27)

If rightful means fail to achieve justice, the sword alone can bring about justice:

Praising compassion and forgiveness
 with your useless wailing,
 Yudhisthir, you encourage
 the cowardice of man.

Tolerance is a curse in people who fail to fight for their rights. To fight for your rights against oppressors is no sin, and is not disturbing real peace:

Who is wrong? He who takes
 away all justice
 or he who kills
 in search of justice?

Canto Four reinforces the ideas of the previous chapters. The Mahābhārat war was not an issue only of five Pāndava brothers against their relatives. It was a complete society that was ready for a fight, for different reasons:

The Mahābhārat was not the fight of only two houses,
it was the growing fire of countless men.
It was not just the struggle of the Kuru dynasty,
but the horrible explosion of all Bharat. (p. 37)

We recognize Russell's thought in Bhīshma's argument about the supremacy of feelings above reason:

Reason throws its net
and catches man in its fold. (p. 48)

Didn't Bhīshma himself make the mistake of letting his reason dominate him, when he choose the side of the (evil) Kaurav brothers, whereas in his heart he loved the five Pāndav brothers more?

My intellect ruled my life
and my heart became my slave. (p. 53)

Bhīshma was convinced that his duty (*dharma*) and his reason obliged him to fight on the side of the Kauravas, but he should have followed his heart and constrained the Kaurav leader Duryodhan.

In *Canto Five* the poet describes the wars which broke out in every period of history and then moves to the ethical question: if killing one person is a sin, how can one justify the killing of thousands in war? At the same time he draws a moving picture of a weeping Yudhisthir holding the garland of victory in his hands. The poet continues to dream of a world where love and justice reign. In moving lines Yudhisthir wails out his repentance. The Canto ends with a ray of hope:

The dust of Kurukshetra is not the end of the path -
man will go far beyond it.
The son of Manu will not be disappointed,
a new light of worldorder will be lit. (p. 68)

Canto Six does not add anything to the narrative and could also have been published as a separate poem. It deals with the issues of man's progress and with the importance of science. Man does not make real progress, the poet argues, because he pays only lip-service to the great saints who came down on earth:

We had the great Bhīshma, Yudhisthir and Lord Krishna,
 Buddha, Ashoka, Christ and Gandhi:
 bowing his head, man accepts them
 as greater than himself.
 His homage is only words,
 while he goes on hating and hurting others.
 He does not leave his old ways. (p. 69)

Science (in 1946) has opened all frontiers and caused immense progress but has turned man into a slave. The feelings of man are disappearing:

Only the intellect has grown without fetter, but
 the land of feelings is left far behind. (p. 70)

Only a balance between reason and feelings can bring about real progress:

The credentials of man on this nectareous earth
 are not his science, his inflammable intellect,
 the curse of blind knowledge on an illusive path
 that burns and kills and grieves creation. (p. 74)

Because reason and feelings are not in proper balance, humankind is subject to all kinds of suffering and strive. The poet complains about the hypocrisy and sensuality which result from this imbalance. In the hands of such humans science becomes a dangerous tool. Only if 'humanity' returns to the humans, can we hope of ever finding happiness:

The earth will be freed from the fever of war,
 and filled with the nectar of truth.
 Man's true self appears when all are sound and healthy,
 when the earth is no longer red with the blood of man,
 when the boundless light of *dharma* promotes goodness
 and man is at peace with one and all. (p. 75)

In *Canto Seven* too the context of the narrative is less important and the poet seems to make use of Bhīshma to formulate his own ideas. In the beginning of the Canto the poet himself speaks, and then continues to speak with the words of Bhīshma. He repeats that injustice is the cause of war and that there will be no peace as long as injustice continues to exist:

If you want to stop war remove your poison teeth,
 liberate the earth from the fear of tigers and wolves,
 turn sacrificial lambs into tigers,
 put deadly poison into them.
 Yudhisthir, this earth is not
 anyone's bought maidservant.
 All its inhabitants
 are born equally. (p. 79)

There is a Marxist ring in his words:

As long as one man's share of happiness
 is not equal to that of another,
 the tumult will not be reduced,
 the struggle will not diminish. (p. 80).

In order to facilitate a comparison with the Hindi text, we have respected the page layout of the 25th (Hindi) edition of Kedarnath Singh, Patna, 1978. We sincerely thank Prof. Morris Augustine, Kyoto, and Prof. Richard Barz, Canberra, for their revision of the text.

CANTO ONE

Who is weeping there in the pages of history,
where is written the price of the blood of youth,
the result of the deeds of a deceitful old man?
His heart is as dirty as his hair is grey,
he does not fight himself,
but has young men butchered.
He thinks, when assured of victory:
'There is bloodshed, but the honour
of the country is saved'!

With honour their names are told
whose husbands lost their lives
to keep the dignity of the land,
whose sons were slain
to save the honour of the country.

Only God knows if the honour of the country
is real or only a mask
hiding that poisonous deceitful fire of treachery
which has burnt for ages like a hungry fire
in the stomach of the leaders of a greedy civilization.

The origin of the treacherous fire full of hatred
cannot be traced in the heart of universal man.
People never want to fight.
Poisonous flames through
the breath of individuals spread.

Before every war man wonders
 if weaponry is the only unfailing remedy
 for injustice, degradation, poison and venomous treachery.

But, man has to fight.
 Even after victory he sees
 truth weeping on the battlefield:
 it laments in the pages of history
 and throws scornful looks
 at the name of the victorious man.

By the stroke of that truth
 helpless veins of life quiver
 like the strings of a lyre
 struck abruptly by an unskilled hand.
 Life is now restless, knowing
 there is no reply to this stroke.

Suddenly breaking the heart
 an irresistible inner echo springs forth
 with the stroke of truth:
 'I have spilled the blood of men,
 Oh God! What have I done?'

But, the hearts of men
 seem made of stone.
 Forgetting the agony of that sting
 they sit again in the saddle of war.
 They kill and are killed
 and shed tears after every victory.

Long ago, in the land of the Kauravas
 the drama of mass-slaughter was finished.
 Drinking the blood from the chest of a man¹,
 the mind of hard-bodied Bhīma was pacified;

Draupadī - woman or the burning flame of revenge? -
 had vowed not to braid her hair for thirteen years.

¹ Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāṇḍav brothers, had been shamelessly dragged by the hair into the court of Duryodhan and dishonoured by Dushāsana, the second of the 100 Kaurav brothers. Her second son, Bhīma, vowed that he would kill Dushāsana and as an act of revenge would drink the blood from his chest. On the sixteenth day of the epic battle Bhīma killed Dushāsana and fulfilled his vow.

Now gnashing her teeth in final anger,

she makes a bloody braid,
oiling her hair
with the warm blood of a man.

Strong-bodied Bhīma snatches the diamond
from the head of Dron's son²,
placing it tenderly in the hand of Draupadī -
the price for the death of her five sons.

No one is left.
Just an old woman and a blind old man
to perform the funeral rites for the Kauravas
or to weep before their funeral fire.

Screaming jubilation
rises in the camp of the Pāṇḍavas,
sweeping over the dense corpsefilled field of Kurukshetra,
rumbling like a worthless voice in the air,
after wandering and returning to the camp,
dying in the ears of the living,
mocking them sarcastically:
'Look! There is complete desolation outside,
they are already gone
whose hearts I wanted to torment.'

Who will hear and understand the mockery
hidden behind that jubilant voice?
All are half-dead in their glee,
semi-conscious with the excitement
of the wine of victory.

In this cheering, but stupid crowd
there is a man,
restless, silently weeping
drowned in his inner sadness.

² A son of saint Bharadvāj, guru Dron taught both the Kaurav and the Pāṇḍav brothers the martial art of archery and the science of military strategy. During the battle he commanded the army of the Kauravas. His son, Ashvatthama, was considered an incarnation of Shiva. He held a diamond in his forehead and was unconquered during the battle till the last day, when Arjuna defeated him and grabbed the diamond from his head.

“True, all those people are gone
beyond the realm of hatred and grief.
This moaning is not heard by the dead -
This jubilation is only a mockery to the living.”

As in a dream he saw Duryodhan saying:
“Yudhisthir! We are far beyond the ocean.
Whatever you say to mock us,
we do not hear.

“At this moment the Mahābhārat
looks like a dream of our inner emptiness.
We feel that it really took place,
forgetting what it was supposed to mean.

“We have arrived on this shore
you are still on the other.
Whose defeat is this? Who has won?
At peace you now enjoy the gift of victory:
mockery, repentance and inner burning.”

The jubilant but useless, lonely voice
stumbled and died in Kurukshetra.
Yudhisthir listened, lost in himself -
A voice of his mind
or merely of gaping emptiness?

“The wide battlefield
became red, drenched in blood.
Limbs of horses and elephants,
broken pieces of chariots
floating on that stream of blood.

“What is left, after this destruction?
Only the mockery of fate?
Has the truth I wanted to seek,
come within my grasp or flown away?

“The fact is that
 what I wanted to hold in my hand
 has flown away with my enemies,
 leaving me with only mockery and repentance.

“The Mahābhārat war was waged in vain.
 How inflamed is this venomous mockery?
 All the people of the land were killed
 by the hatred of five intolerant men.

“Draupadī now wears her heavenly attire
 and we enjoy a conquered kingdom
 for which millions of mothers lost their sons
 and millions of wives their husbands.

“How can I enjoy, with a heart of stone,
 this kingdom drenched in blood?
 It is stained with the blood of men,
 even with the blood of Abhimanyu³.

Like thunder it crashed in his memory,
 bending Yudhisthir under a terrible burden.
 His mind was depressed, still searching
 for truth in the ashes of war.

His heart was drowned in an ocean of grief and pain,
 no bubbles or foam appeared on the surface.
 Breathing heavily, he said:
 'Arjun, I must go to our Grandfather.'

The jubilant voice, like his inner emptiness,
 stumbled and died in the air.

³ Abhimanyu was the son of Arjun, the third of the Pāndav brothers.

CANTO TWO

The invincible Bhīshma⁴
 said to approaching Death:
 'Know that the time to leave has not yet come.
 Remain where you are!' and he lay down again
 on a bed and pillow of arrows.

Vyāsa⁵ says, that Bhīshma was lying there, freed,
 snatching his life from the hands of Death.
 Humbly, with folded hands,
 Death waited, for fear of punishment.

From the peak, the Grandfather
 gazed at the shore of life,
 lost in deep yogic trance.
 Yudhisthir saw cheerful light
 radiating from his grey hair
 and from his body, pierced by arrows.
 He saluted Bhīshma, touching
 his feet with his head,
 washing his toes with his tears.
 Nervously, perturbed, Yudhisthir cried out:
 "Oh, Grandfather! The Mahābhārat war has failed".

"Duryodhan had left the world as a martyr,
 leaving me with only destruction.
 Again and again he blows
 the victory trumpets in the sky,
 leaving his lifeless body in my hands.
 This dead corpse, left behind here,
 seems to ask me by its dead silence:
 'I am left here as the price of your victory.
 Tell me, who won and who lost the battle?'

⁴ Bhīshma is the great granduncle of both the Kaurav and Pāndav brothers. He was a great warrior, a learned person and a statesman. Although he took command on the side of the Kaurav brothers, his heart was really with the Pāndav brothers.

⁵ Vyāsa is the grandfather of both the Kaurav and the Pāndav brothers. He is also the legendary 'author' of the *Mahābhārat* epic.

“Grandfather! Whose is this defeat?
 Who is weeping aloud on these ruins?
 Who is searching vainly for happiness
 in the heaps of ashes?
 Who is forging a crown with flames?
 Who is pondering the irony of destiny,
 resting on the bank of the river of human blood?
 Who is looking at the funeral flames of kinsmen?
 Who is listening to the heartbreaking sobs of Uttarā⁶?

“Had I known the outcome of the Mahābhārat,
 I would have fought with my moral strength,
 leaving aside all physical might.
 I would have laid a new foundation for history,
 defeating Duryodhan with austerity, patience and sacrifice.
 Even if Duryodhan could not be reformed by my penance,
 if granite could not be melted by my agony,
 I would not have spilled the streams of blood,
 I would have died as a beggar along with my brothers.

“When the seeds of war were sown
 my divine wisdom was not with me.
 The bow and arrows of Arjun, the mace of Bhīma
 and my own sword overturned my judgement.
 When, on the battlefield,
 Arjun was paralyzed by illusions,
 the Lord poured oil on the dying flames⁷.
 Grandfather! Everyone's wisdom perished,
 unbridled arrogance destroyed them all.
 “Krishna says that war is virtuous, but
 my heart burns every moment in grief.
 Why can't man save himself
 from this scorching ancient curse?

What was the Mahābhārat? Outstanding heroes
 like you, Abhimanyu and Duryodhan,
 felled by sheer deception.
 Why have we survived?
 For what sin?

⁶ Uttarā is the wife of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun (see above, p. 13).

⁷ Lord Krishna encouraged the doubting Arjun to get involved in the battle.

True, the *Gītā*⁸ of Lord Krishna calls for action,
 but the enlightenment of life teaches non-action.
 I know we have to fight,
 but a blooddrenched victory seems sinful.
 Does happiness follow destruction?
 Or tearful sorrow follow peace?
 I do not know. What is ethical?
 I do not know. Did virtue bloom at Kurukshetra?
 Or did great sin explode into a ferocious war?

“A terrible fire is burning
 in the crown snatched from the Kuru⁹ dynasty.
 Can a sin be removed through a coronation?
 The water of sacred places is poison for a sinner.
 Like a dreadful serpent victory is biting me,
 there is no strength left in me to fight it.
 I wonder, again and again, how to accept the royal splendour,
 the lotus blossoming in the slough of blood.

“I hear the sobbings of a mother without a son
 and the painful cries of a child without a father.
 Wherever my gaze falls, I see
 the faces of widows, without *sindūr*¹⁰.
 When I run away and hide myself in my room,
 I hear the loud laughter of cruel Death.
 Sleeping or waking, I am stunned
 as if the blood of Arjun's son is calling me.

“Since the day the fire of war was extinguished,
 another fire is burning in my mind.
 Grandfather! I see no way
 I can show my face to the world.
 People will look at me with hatred,
 I hear contempt in every atom.
 Looking at people, my eyes bow down in shame,
 I feel like fleeing alone into the forest.

⁸ In the dialogue of the *Bhagavadgītā* Lord Krishna argues that Arjun has to fight. Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu, is in the *Mahābhārata* epic the counsellor of the Pāṇḍav brothers.

⁹ In the lunar race of the Kuru dynasty the Kaurav and Pāṇḍav brothers were born.

¹⁰ The vermillion *sindūr* powder, on the forehead of a Hindu woman, is a sign that her husband is alive.

“My disgrace will be greater if I commit suicide,
 let me leave the city and go into the forest.
 I will shed tears freely, hiding in a cave,
 where even birds and animals cannot see me.
 I know that even then my sin will not be removed,
 but at least I can lessen my grief by hiding.
 My tormented heart will not be hurt by mockery,
 in the forest I will not be called Dharmarāj¹¹.”

Then Yudhisthir became silent,
 controlling his unbounded grief,
 as a cloud, filled to the brim with an ocean,
 is restless and helpless if it cannot rain.

Bhīshma gazed at the sky, as if
 measuring the depth of Yudhisthir's heart.
 And he said: “Alas! Fate of man!
 Can you rise in a world
 of great ideals, beyond darkness,
 in the spirit of a man, personified today
 by sorrow, grief and the shock of resignation?”

He said to Yudhisthir: “You have seen a great storm?
 It comes with thundering sounds like death itself,
 breaking, shaking the branches in a wood,
 uprooting thousands of weak trees in rage
 making them sleep on the ground for ever.
 Weak branches of trees break with terrifying noise,
 birds' nests with tender fledglings fall.
 Every part of the forest-queen is covered
 with uprooted trees and broken branches,
 with broken tufts of flowers and the bodies of birds.

¹¹ Dharma-rāj or 'king of justice' is an epithet of Yudhisthir, the eldest Pāṇḍav brother.

But the huge tree with its many-layered rings
 is never frightened by a cruel gale.
 The storm goes over its head,
 only blowing off leaves and breaking branches.

What is left after the storm?
 The ruined splendour of the forest,
 the piteous widowhood of the forestqueen,
 are seen by that huge tree,
 living in disgust and grief,
 bending all its tired leaves,
 silently in the calm sky, and thinking:
 'Why does nature send storms?'

That senseless tree does not know
 that nature itself is drowned in grief.
 This perilous wind is not its weapon
 but the ineluctable explosion of its spirit,
 that holds all fires in itself:
 an explosion is natural and inevitable.

In men too flames of passions rise,
 bundled together in a fierce fire.
 Heated first is the ugly heart of one person,
 then the whole sky of the masses is caught in flames,
 with an all-devouring hatred, poison, envy and enmity.

When the furnaces are ready,
 the volcano of war erupts
 on the pretext of political riddles
 or the ideal of patriotism.

In the roots is the same poison,
 spreading through hatred and selfish enmity.

Everybody knows the evils of war:
 total destruction is the result of war.
 Millions are killed for five men's happiness.

Do not think that in Kurukshetra
 the happiness of five brothers was the only issue.
 In the eyes of the victims of the war

the happiness or sorrow of five was not the only purpose.

In their hearts all had their own feelings
of human selfishness or hot valour.
The spirit that pushed them to the front.
Their emotion had all kinds of reasons.

The madness of war is contagious:
a spark burns somewhere and
all winds blow at once,
spreading the fire, running, laughing, boiling.

At that moment where is the time
for deep meditation or profound thoughts?
Blazing flames send a challenge
to the hidden tiger in a sensible man.

Human pride rises to the challenge,
filled with vengeance:
blood wants to break the veins,
a sword comes into the hand by itself.

Nobody wants to be sick,
but when sickness overcomes him,
only bitter medicines can help:
can sweet food be a cure?

Vain are your considerations about
war being a sin or a virtue.
There is no act on earth
which by itself, is sinful or virtuous.

It is true, the Lord said the other day:
 'Important is the feeling in the doer's heart,
 his intention in the war of life,
 whatever the act may be.'

This applies all the more to a real war:
 nobody wants it,
 but all must stand united,
 when the enemy threatens and challenges.

Much I have seen and heard, but the difference
 between justice and injustice is unclear to me.
 I do not have the power to draw
 a line between virtue and sin.

I know, a firelike valour
 is necessary to stay alive.
 That a war cannot be sinful
 that is waged in defence.

If someone takes your freedom, you sin if
 you rely on renunciation and meditation.
 It is virtuous to smash the force
 which stretches its hands towards you.

Only a weak man, down-trodden and without means,
 will have recourse to tears.
 Can a powerful man bow down
 and beg for alms of mercy?

You say that war is evil, but
 as long as swords of selfishness
 clash in terrific combat,
 war is inevitable in the world.

It's a waste to grieve or lament
 for that which is inevitable.
 If you don't fight or make others fight,
 this fire will flare up for any reason.

Even if the Pāṇdavas had remained beggars,
 this natural explosion could not be averted.
 Furious planets, on all sides,
 would strike on heads from above.

There is another secret of Dharma¹²,
 why should I conceal it from the future?
 For two days I have been in the mouth of death,
 I am leaving this world.

Devotion, compassion and forgiveness,
 obedience and renunciation, are virtues of man.
 But when society is at stake, we must
 forget devotion and sacrifice.

Only the peaceloving man in your soul
 weeps for the destruction of the Kauravas.
 Ask the social feelings in your heart:
 wasn't the Mahābhārat a necessity?

When the Pāṇdavas left as beggars,
 losing home and riches,
 imagine what the people felt,
 their friends, opposing such injustice?

You hid behind the morality of a promise
 like a eunuch, allowed your wife to be insulted.
 In her the honour was snatched away from all those
 who sided with the Pāṇdavas.
 That day, you took no action.

¹² Dharma in the Hindu tradition refers to one's duty, religious observances, virtue, righteousness.

Tell me, was that non-action righteous or
the anger that flashed like fire in the eyes of Bhīma?

Don't make me angry talking like a coward.
Heroism and sacrifice were always my ideals.
Waving the ārtī¹³ light of valour in the temple of my clan,
I leave this world on the chariot of war.

Renunciation, meditation, alms! I know them all:
they are the virtues of detached ascetics,
of those who have no bows or arrows.
They are the false pretensions of weaklings
afraid of war who think:
a life of humiliation is better than death.

Pity, forgiveness, sacrifice and meditation
make the mind of a man sublime,
but when blood-thirsty beasts surround him,
only a strong arm can rescue him.

The moral strength you talk about
cannot be a weapon of the body.
Its realm is the mental world,
where man fights his passions.

Who can win a physical battle
only with the help of moral strength?
That is of no use,
when brutality raises its sword.

It is only the mind which respects
the strength of meditation and sacrifice.
In the world people are never defeated
by the mental power of yogis.

¹³ During the ārtī ceremony in a temple a plate with oillamps is waved in front of the deity.

In the forest Rām¹⁴ saw heaps of bones of saints
 and swore that he would kill all the demons.
 But tender-hearted Sītā asked: 'Is it only weapons
 which can remedy corrupt and cruel beings?'
 Rām, black-as-cloud replied: 'No, my dear!
 Man can be reformed by meditation and sacrifice,
 but, the power of meditation will not always work
 against the evil designs of immoral men.'

¹⁴ Rāmchandra, the son of king Dashrath in the solar dynasty of Ayodhyā and main hero of the *Rāmāyan* epic, is considered an incarnation of Vishnu. His wife Sītā was kidnapped during his peregrinations in the forest.

CANTO THREE

I agree, Yudhisthir, war is a curse,
but, tell me what is that peace
that resting on injustice
looks innocent and simple?

That peace accumulates huge treasures
by strength and deceit,
grabbing the food of the hungry,
robbing the wealth of the weak.

It controls everything, standing
guard at each fence and saying:
'Shut up. This is the nectar of peace.
Don't spread the poison of revolt.

'Do not move, let me drink
the blood of your heart.
Let the empire of peace be intact -
Live and let live.'

True, they now have
all power in their hands,
those peaceloving saints.
Why should they welcome war?

There, happiness cannot be shared,
love and justice cannot live,
where unrest is crushed
by fear of the sword.

Where rulers breed
corruption and immorality,
where the reins of society
are held by the unjust.

Where fair proposals of peace
may not be considered,
where those speaking of truth
are executed at once.

Where only the strength of the sword
is the basis of rule.
where the heart of every person
is filled with suppressed anger.

Where the mind of man is dying
under the burden of injustice,
where every man is cursing himself
for his own cowardice.

Where the conflict is unending
between egotism and hatred,
where the surface is peaceful and calm,
a fierce fire glowing underneath.

Where an explosion is threatening
the face of time,
where the glare of suppressed feelings
is seen in the movements of all.

Where wicked rulers do not read
the signs of the times.
There stupid fools keep
adding fire to the fires.

They invent new ways to exploit,
they ignore or oppress,
they send like piercing arrows
their sarcastic remarks.

When one day
a furious revolt breaks out,
when man, beyond control,
falls on the oppressors like death,

Then, tell me, who is responsible
- egotism or hatred -
for that horrible burning inferno?
Who is the culprit of that war?

In your sadness you think
the world was burnt by your hands.
Think, then, did the fire of war
rain suddenly from the skies?

Has it broken out
suddenly from the earth?
Was this dreadful flame lit
with the chanting of hymns?

Were there no wars
before Kurukshetra?
Were there never before feelings
of revenge in the heart of man?

When peace holds a sword
to suppress revolts and revolutions,
then, you must know,
it is preparing for another war.

There will be no peace on earth,
if happiness is not equal for all -
there should not be too much for one
or too little for another.

Real peace rules over the heart,
but not the body,
it rules over devotion and affection,
these great feelings of man.

Justice is the first condition for peace.
Without justice for all,
the mansion of peace
is built on sand.

False peace, always suspicious,
is even afraid of itself -
it trusts no one
except its own sword.

Those enjoying such peace
and all its pleasures,
strive for it untiringly
as an unattainable treasure.

But think of those
whose blood is sucked,
whose bones are crushed -
Do you understand their agony?

When rights are not given,
and opposition is a sin,
Tell me, Yudhisthir, should the exploited
live or should they die?

The valiant beg for their right,
 and when refused, they seize it.
 They fight for justice,
 ready to die or to live.

Who said that fighting
 for your rights is a sin,
 killing or being killed in a war
 with the sword of justice?

Praising compassion and forgiveness
 with your useless wailing,
 Yudhisthir, you encourage
 the cowardice of man.

When could meditation ever stand up
 against the blows of violence?
 Even the armies of the gods
 were defeated by the demons!

If you rely on mental power
 rather than on manly strength,
 why did you return from the forest,
 greedy for Bharat's kingdom¹⁵?

Bhīma drank poison¹⁶,
 the lac-house¹⁷ was burnt,
 you were exiled to the forest¹⁸,
 dragged by the hair to the court
 your beloved was treated as a slave!

You relied on forgiveness,
 meditation and moral strength.
 Tell me, when, where and how was
 the man-tiger Duryodhan ever defeated?

¹⁵ Ancient India was called Bhārat, after Bharat, the son of king Dushyant and Shakuntalā.

¹⁶ Long before the Mahābhārat battle, the evil (Kaurav) Duryodhan had tried to poison Bhīm, the second Pāndav brother. After taking the poisonous food Bhīm fell down and was thrown into the Ganges river. He survived.

¹⁷ When Yudhisthir was appointed heir of the Kuru dynasty, Duryodhan was so envious that he tried to kill the Pāndav brothers. He invited them to a hunters' pavillion and set fire to it at midnight. The Pāndav brothers, however, escaped miraculously through a tunnel.

¹⁸ The Pāndav brothers and their wife Draupadī were exiled to the forest as a result of a dice game where Yudhisthir lost, through the deceit of Duryodhan.

As you became tolerant
 and more and more humble,
 the Kauravas called you
 an ever greater coward.

Tolerating all atrocities
 can have only one result:
 a man loses all manliness
 becoming tender and soft.

Forgiveness suits the serpent
 that has poison in its teeth.
 Without teeth and without poison
 what can a humble serpent do?

For three days, Rām begged the sea
 to clear a path to cross¹⁹ -
 He recited hymns of praise,
 so melodious and charming.

Not a sound or whisper came
 in reply from the sea,
 till Rām's bravery exploded
 as fire from his bow.

'Help me, help me' called the sea
 and fell for shelter at His feet:
 Accepting terms of slavery
 the fool was bound with shackles.

The glory of humility
 will shine from the arrow.
 Respectable are words of truce
 only with those who have power.

¹⁹ In the *Rāmāyan* epic we read how Rām's wife, Sītā, was kidnapped by the demon Rāvan and taken across the waters to Lankā. In order to rescue her Rām recited hymns of praise and begged the sea to clear a path.

The world adores compassion,
 forgiveness and endurance
 only when the pride of strength
 shines radiantly behind them.

Without competence to take revenge,
 forgiveness is a waste,
 A pretext to drink poison,
 a deceit of words.

Hiding their cowardice
 behind a curtain of mercy,
 Can people know the mind
 of the valiant and the brave?

Can cowards know
 the hidden fire in a man?
 It comes from his heart
 and rises to his head.

Blood does not boil in their veins,
 it does not know the rush of fire.
 They only drink the holy water of Shiva's feet²⁰,
 they have not tasted the deadly poison.

Their heart never burns in anger,
 when hurt they do not rise.
 They never knew the force of their arm
 and rely on their moral strength.

What does their tolerance mean
 if they cannot hit and strike?
 Isn't forgiveness their only way
 since they cannot take revenge?

²⁰ Lord Shiva heroically swallowed the poison that emerged from the ocean when gods and demons churned the ocean in search of the drink of immortality. Cowards do not drink that poison, they only take the ritual water poured over Shiva's Lingam.

Helpless cowards take the blow
 who have no boldness in their veins.
 Compassion is an insult for the impotent,
 for the brave an ornament.

The flames of valour burn with revenge,
 to shun revenge is a great sin.
 Only those bear insults in silence
 whom the heat of valour does not burn.

How can a person tolerate a blow,
 with bow and arrows in his hands?
 Tolerance and forgiveness adorn the victor,
 they are a disgrace for the defeated.

Even a blade of grass touching its body
 makes the cobra hiss in anger.
 The lion roars aloud in its den
 when the elephants trumpet in the forest.

When touched thorns pierce and fire burns.
 Look! The ocean comes to swallow the earth.
 The radiance of revenge shines in the universe,
 the birthright of all creatures.

Not in looting can an army take honour,
 not for greed can a warrior fight.
 Not in robbing or raping is there merit:
 sword and business do not go together.

When a lion is hit and wounded,
 at once he rises in revenge.
 Virtue blossoms on the brightness of a sword,
 awakening valour in a war of justice.

It is the nature of fire to burn -
 do not invite blowing winds.
 Dreadful volcanoes will explode -
 do not sit on them and wail.

The serpent will destroy the world -
do not awaken and excite it.
Lightning will strike from the skies -
do not insult it with arrogance.

Who brings war: the flag-bearer
or the trampler of injustice?
Those crushed by the mountain or
those standing on top, laughing?

Those preaching peace, lost in pleasure
or those revolting in starvation?
Who brings war: those who set traps
or those destroying them in anger?

The sword of revolt is not sinful,
to call it a sin is a sin.
Peace that supports exploitation is war,
such peace is a horrible battle.

Accepting such peace is defeating humanity,
a disregard of God, the end of the bold,
a crime of man, the death of mankind.
Here only revolution is justified.

Yudhisthir, you must remember:
the world is ferocious,
egoism rules and
deceit prevails everywhere.

I am also ready to fight
the war-mongering in the world.
But how to spread
compassion, love and non-violence?

How can men live together
like affectionate brothers,
how can the fire of anger be put out,
how can war be stopped?

How can the world become a kingdom of love,
how can life become smooth and simple,
How can the poison of hate forever
be banished from the nature of man?

How can the stream of love flow
and shower on man forever,
how can men sow the seeds of love
in the hearts of one another.

How sad, the world has
reached only half-way.
Now, the dream of peace
shines in distant skies.

That ideal descends to earth
rarely and forlorn -
But it takes clear shape in the
mind of a Yudhisthir.

It attacks the fortress of hate,
knocking at the locked iron door
of man's mental sphere,
again and again.

Distressed by hate and malice,
strife and agony, it
vanishes, touching only
the heart of one or two.

Now I see only one Yudhisthir,
 countless Duryodhan's all around.
 How can the creeping vine of peace flourish,
 how can it be well nourished?

The lyre of peace cannot
 be played in all harmony,
 if the echo of its pure tune
 does not resound in every heart.

Peace is not a burden
 imposed on man from above.
 It is an inner light
 flashing out from the purest heart.

Peace is a flow of pure water
 recognised by love,
 accepted not by the sword-fearing
 body, but by the free mind.

Like the image of Pārvatī²¹, peace
 is not made in the house of a potter.
 It always takes birth in the
 dispassionate mind of man.

Removing all causes of poisonous
 and explosive rebellion,
 the dispassionate mind of man
 takes the form of peace.

When this peace descends,
 there is no room for fear -
 no country will be darkened
 by the clouds of suspicion.

²¹ Pārvatī is the consort of Shiva.

Peace! Where is that soothing peace,
 that bestower of equality?
 Look! Now it is only
 the guardian of inequality!

It has a sweet face, it speaks sweet words
 and appears in attractive garb.
 Beware, Yudhisthir! The teeth of this cobra
 are filled with deadly poison.

It fills the prison of Jarasandha²²
 with defeated kings.
 It drinks their blood
 and swallows their tears.

The pyre burning at Kurukshetra
 was not that of peace.
 The voice from Arjun's bow
 was not that of an evil revolt.

The serpent that looted wealth
 was burnt in the war.
 An irresistible valour shone
 in the arrow of Arjun.

Not accepting a peace
 that steals everything,
 man attacks like death
 risking his own life.

Who is wrong? He who takes
 away all justice
 or he who kills
 in search of justice?

²² King Jarasandha of Magadha in ancient India was defeated by Bhīma (and Krishna) and all his prisoners were released.

CANTO FOUR

Bhīshma: A celibate by vow²³,
 a pillar of Dharma,
 embodiment of strength,
 a most detached man,
 living in the world,
 but not of the world.

He gave up his crown to fulfill his duty,
 he laid down his life out of love -
 Did ever a man like him so gallant,
 live in this world?

Like a king of elephants lying on arrow-heads,
 like a tired eagle, like an exhausted king of serpents,
 with the enormous weight of his strength and heroic life,
 conscious with only great effort, he controls death.

The Grandfather gave a battle account to Yudhisthir,
 making a garland with the thoughts of his agony
 When the sea of the heart is churned and swirls,
 man reveals his hidden agony.

(Bhīshma says:)

“He who steals justice, brings about war.
 Yudhisthir! It is no sin to protect yourself.
 Hell is open for those who tolerate the sin,
 not for those, who challenge it in war.

“No one wants to fight without reason,
 no one wants to kill or be killed.
 Even unjust peace no one wants to disturb,
 protecting love for peace at all cost.

²³ Bhīshma, the great granduncle in the present narrative, was the son of king Shantanu and queen Gangā. When his wife died king Shantanu wanted to marry Satyawatī, but her father would allow this marriage only on condition that her children would inherit the throne. King Shantanu could not agree with this condition but his son Bhīshma volunteered to remain a celibate in order to make the (second) marriage of his father possible.

“Love of peace can only stop a man,
it cannot stop an immoral demon.
Can a demon, ever, recognise a gentleman?
For him humility is a coward's trait.

“As time passes conditions get worse,
the chain of crimes becomes harsh and horrible.
Till one day a huge explosion erupts,
when man, staking his life, attacks the demon.

“Do not think that only two are involved in this war,
one victorious and the other defeated.
The fire of only two cannot destroy the world,
the world is made of more than just a few.

“Yudhisthir! Can a volcano explode suddenly?
It explodes when inside heat builds up.
Can a thunderbolt fall from a cloudless sky?
Lightning flashes when clouds have gathered.

“The Mahābhārat was not the fight of only two houses,
it was the growing fire of countless men.
It was not just the struggle of the Kuru dynasty,
but was the horrible explosion of all Bharat.

“A poisonous wind had been blowing in the world for ages,
the earth was suffering forest-fires in silence.
Each was ready to take revenge on the other,
looking for a pretext for war.

“Some were envious of the valour of another,
some were disturbed by another's cruelty,
some were tormented by the rise of a king,
some were nursing the snake of vengeance.

“Karna²⁴ wanted to fulfil his vow of killing Arjun.
 Drupad²⁵ wanted revenge on guru Dron.
 Shakuni²⁶ wanted to repay the debt of his father,
 throwing the flag of the Kuru dynasty into the dust.

“That cheat had no affection for Duryodhan -
 appearing as a well-wisher he fanned the fire of hatred.
 The fire went on smouldering, quietly,
 ready to burst out in a ferocious war.

“Irritated by the reforms of Krishna himself,
 the angry kings joined together as an army.
 Their pride did not fade with the killing of Shishupāl²⁷,
 their arrogance was hiding behind a mask.

“Divided by enmity and strife,
 the people were joining the two armies.
 They stood with burning fire in their hearts,
 with stretched bows, with swords in their sheaths.

“If any kind of poison was hiding
 in the heart of kings,
 Yudhisthir, it exploded
 at your RājsĀya celebrations.

“A man desires one thing,
 destiny gives him another.

²⁴ Kuntī, the mother of the five Pāṇḍav brothers, had an illicit affair with the Sun, and from that relation Karna was born. He became a rival of his Pāṇḍav half-brothers and an ally of Duryodhan in the Mahābhārat war.

²⁵ Drupad, king of Pāṇchāl, was the father of Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāṇḍav brothers.

²⁶ Although he behaved as their friend, Shakuni was in fact responsible for the downfall of the Kaurav brothers. His sister Gāndhārī was, according to her horoscope, doomed to become a widow soon after her marriage. In order to bypass this curse, her father married her first to a goat, and then to the blind kind Dhritarāshtra. The goat died but Gāndhārī became the mother of the 100 Kaurav brothers. When these brothers heard of the first marriage of their mother, they were furious. They imprisoned her father and her 100 brothers, starving them to death. But the little daily rations were saved for one brother, Shakuni, who was miraculously saved, while all the others died. He vowed to take revenge against the Kaurav brothers. As an expert in the game of dice, he took the side of the Kaurav Duryodhan in his game against Yudhisthir. He helped Duryodhan to defeat Yudhisthir and thus to gain the kingdom. But that would be the cause of his downfall because the Mahābhārat war resulted from it. In this way Shakuni repaid the debt to his father.

²⁷ The story of king Shishupāl is related to the Rājsūy sacrifice in the next stanza; in that religious ceremony performed by Yudhisthir to establish his universal rule, Shishupāl challenged the universality of the ceremony --and the power of Yudhisthir-- and was killed by Krishna. The reference suggests that the seeds for the Mahābhārat conflict were already in the minds of all the conflicting kings present at the ceremony.

Nectar trees bear poisonous fruits:
inexplicable are the ways of nature.

“Making you the emperor of a country
in the Rājsūya festival,
Krishna wanted to find the right way
to bring about and preserve unity.

“So different was the result,
fire erupted in the world,
Hatred struck its roots
in the minds of defeated kings.

“They could not understand
the good intentions of Krishna.
With suspicion, they only saw
the growing might of Indraprastha²⁸.

“In the barriers put up
against the veneration of the great,
we see the arrogance of man,
his error and illusion.

“The royal umbrella of Indraprastha
was an ornament for all Bhārat.
Honouring and respecting its king,
who could be dishonoured?

“Even in the honest tribute of respect
many of the kings felt frustrated:
their deluded minds made them think
that giving respect was a loss of prestige.

“In the tribute they
saw their own helplessness.
In the splendour and valour of others
they saw their own humiliation.

“In the Rājsūya festival they saw
a display of military glory,
the deception of a cunning king
intent on expanding his kingdom.

²⁸ Indraprastha --now an archaeological site in Delhi-- was the capital of the Pāṇḍav brothers, after the Kuru kingdom had been divided between them and the Kaurav brothers. Eventually the Pāṇḍav brothers had to leave their capital and go into exile.

“Yudhisthir! Nobody wants to lose
his self-respect and honour -
Nobody wants to bow down, honestly,
before a growing power.

“Not all who gathered under your banner
joined out of devotion:
some came with a feeling of affection,
others came fearing the sword.

“Whatever the feeling in his mind,
each person had one certainty:
that tribute paid to the crown
can in no way be entirely honest.

“They knew, slowly slavery was
coming down on their heads:
the RājsĀya sacrifice
is the signal of a growing empire.

“It has crushed
the prestige of countless kings,
of valourous and great heroes,
of men with prodigious strength.

“Yudhisthir, you extended hospitality
whole-heartedly, to all the kings,
with humility, modesty and obedience,
with gentle and sweet words.

“No, the precious pearl of liberty
cannot be bought with this -
The ever burning fire in the heart
cannot be stopped by this.

“Only a stupid and foolish king
can be pacified by kind words,
by the humility of the triumphant,
by the embrace of the opponent.

“A clever king pacifies his foes
with a show of embrace -
He never gives his heart
into the hands of his enemies.

“Though the kings offered presents,
their fear and anger had not cooled.
Full of antagonism and hatred,
they went away from Indraprastha.

“Yudhisthir! Do you remember
the warnings of Vyāsa,
the frightening prophesy of the saint
at the end of the festival?

'Bad planets started to come together,
spreading ruin in the sky.
Would the world be engulfed
in a deadly large scale war?

'There would be some kind of peace
for thirteen years in the world.
Then we would see the explosion
of a bloody and dreadful war.

'There would be total destruction,
death would play a horrible game.
Doomsday would descend on the earth,
trumpets of the end would be blown.'

“What a prophesy of an enlightened seer,
not a guess of phantasy!
Vyāsa knows, at every moment
in what direction the world is moving.

“All were in ecstasy with the celebration,
but the saint's heart was not at peace:
he knew the danger of the fire
rising from the glorious platform.

“He cautioned all the heroes
present in the royal court -
He advised them all: observe
restraint at every step.

“How can an egoistic man,
full of emotions, observe restraint?
Would he be frightened today
of disasters belonging to tomorrow?

“Not even a year had passed
when the roar of death was heard,
the senseless clouds of danger
spread over Indraprastha.

“Who knew that destruction
would spread with such ease,
that the misfortune of Bharat
would come in the form of gambling?

“Who knew the fortitude of Duryodhan
would desert him in such haste?
Who knew that a dreadful fire would erupt
from the fire-pit of RājsĀya?

“Yudhisthir! It is true that
the fire was not new at all,
it was burning in the mind
of Duryodhan for many years.

“When the painted bird
was hit by the arrow of Arjun,
on that day, this wicked fire
was lit in the heart of Duryodhan.

“It poisoned the dynasty and
set the lac-house on fire -
it was Shakuni's deceitful dice
and it made the Pāndavas suffer in the jungle.

“In the full royal court,
it was not the disgrace of Draupadī -
It was the same dreadful fire
erupting from his fearless heart.

“As the sari of helpless Draupadī
was taken off slowly,
a hidden and wicked fire
was more and more exposed.

“Like her long black hair
that huge fire fell forth,
exposing its different guises
in the heap of her clothes.

“Her strong character shielded her
in the moments of distress -
the end of her sari turned
into an aura of radiance around her.

“The wicked fire of Duryodhan
was dancing, exposed without shame,
testing its own impudence
and the manhood of the land.

“Why, tell me, Yudhisthir, on that day
did both you and I remain helpless?
Why, tell me, did our blood not boil
in our veins to defend her.

“On that day, the flag of honour
disappeared from the land -
A woman, disappointed with men
called on the gods for help²⁹.

“The war should have started
on that occasion in our land,
cleaning our swords the same day
from all blood and filth.

“Wrapped in a sari the innocent princess
was dragged away from the palace,
taken to the royal court as a slave
lost in a bet with a cheating gambler.

“Fearlessly, before all, they wanted
to take off her clothes of modesty.
Out of their mind the heroes of Bharat
did not even open their mouths.

“Who can understand this new
and curious policy of justice?
Future generations, no doubt,
will spit in our face.

²⁹ When Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāṇḍav brothers was shamelessly dragged into the court of Duryodhan, her own husbands could not help her. She called on Krishna to rescue her.

“Remembering that day
my heart burns even now.
A dagger enters my heart,
wounding my inner self.

“Shame! Shame! The princess
was humiliated in front of me.
Wicked rascals dishonoured
a helpless lady before my eyes.

“Yet, I am alive, the earth did not crack open,
the directions did not quake,
lightning did not strike,
the skies did not roar in anger.

“Wasn't I all my life
like a burning flame,
not blood, but fire
flowing in every vein of my body?

“I could not tolerate
anybody's empty pride,
I could not remain silent
seeing injustice done to anyone.

“This stigma sticks to me -
it cannot be removed by washing
or burning my inner self
or wailing day and night.

“I am dying with a question
about my gallant career.
Yudhisthir! I am leaving with
important advice to you:

“It is the duty of the brave
to walk on burning coals.
It is the duty of the brave
to walk on the sharp edge of the sword.

“It is the duty of the brave
to face flying arrows.
It is the duty of the brave
to drink poison with a smile.

“To offer their heads in sacrifice,
carrying the ritual fire in their hands,
teaching all the world
the ultimate lesson of sacrifice.

“The greatest duty of man
is always to be a burning fire,
to intensify the flames of valour,
never to tolerate an evil touch.

“Without the lamp of reasoning
the brave walk with closed eyes.
They jump on the ritual platform
and offer themselves in the fire.

“When bravery goes out
to consult with reason,
it stumbles in disgrace
and loses its radiance.

“True, the jar of the intellect
is filled with sweet nectar.
But remember, in hard times,
sweetness turns into poison.

“Reason cannot properly evaluate
 insults and compliments -
 By thinking too much
 it extinguishes the flames of valour.

“It extinguished the sparks
 of your manliness
 when your eyes did not burn,
 seeing the stripping off of Draupadī's sari.

“The dilemma paralyzed me,
 made me a coward.
 By the time I woke up
 the opportunity was gone.

“Youth walks with pride,
 with head straight, shooting arrows.
 Weak old age is crushed
 under the weight of reason.

“Watching the wild river of youth,
 terror-struck reason stands aloof
 on the bank in utter silence,
 dejected and crippled.

“Fearing to be swept away
 like a blade of grass in a stream,
 afraid of floods it hides
 in its own prison.

“In the soil of aggression
 youth blooms like a flower,
 filling the world with
 beauty and fragrance.

“Reason hides on the side,
watching and waiting for the moment
to strike in turn
when the floods of life recede.

“True, when the speed of the blood
slows down in old age,
the stream of life calms down
to take some rest.

“Reason throws its net
catching man in its folds
and life continues
with all its complications.

“Forgiveness or vengeance, what is
the duty of man in this world?
Death or fight -
what is the right remedy for this disease?

“Strength or wisdom, what is better?
Is it the sword or humility,
is it a bloodstained victory
or defeat by compassion?

“Where burns the pure flame?
In enthusiasm or in reason?
In the dying fire of old age
or in the quick eruption of youth?

“Life is weary and tired
in old age, an exhausted lion
relying on principles,
enduring arrows of sarcasm.

“A slave of reason, old age
turns on the wheel of time,
unable to stop illusions,
unable to control events.

“Time flees away, destroying
the radiance of bravery.
Lost in remorse an old man
goes on weeping and wailing.

“Staying in the palace of Duryodhan
I suffered the fruits of old age.
Restless, my bravery fluttered
in the cage of my skeleton.

“I could not help the Kauravas,
I could not support the Pāndavas.
The dilemma of old age
kept tearing me apart.

“Duty and love, both were dear to me,
the choice between them hard to make.
I gave my body to one side,
my heart to the other.

“When the clouds cleared and
the light of life appeared,
the spring of love welled up again
from beneath the sand.

“Duty was defeated and
the victory bells of love rang.
I gave my body as a gift
to them who also had my heart.

“I did not fall to the arrows of Arjun,
what fell was my old age.
Youth appeared again
piercing the darkness of my age.

“Giving my heart to affection
and my strength to duty,
I was filled with joy
when I came to Kurukshetra.

“My mental conflict would end, I thought,
if I separated love and reason.
But I did not know that the bond of love
is stronger than the rope of duty.

“Under pressure of moral obligation
I became the slave of duty,
but love kept urging quietly
to offer myself in sacrifice.

“Yudhisthir! It is in great danger
that the mask disappears
and the real face of a man
is revealed to one and all.

“As the war went on
and events developed,
my suppressed youth rose
to embrace the bond of love.

“The illusion of reason vanished,
the mist of duty was blown from my eyes.
My love called out impatiently
deep in my body and mind:

“Arjun, come and take all,
fill me with arrows till I fall.
I cannot bear this separation,
take me to the abode of love.”

“The stream of love that stopped
when I took the vow of celibacy,
burst out in Kurukshetra
and became a mighty river.

“There was no cool breeze to blow
and touch the creeping vine of my mind.
There were no sweet birds to sing
behind the flowers and leaves.

“I could not honour anyone
offering colourful flowers,
There was none to whom I could offer
myself as a gift.

“But unrest was stirring
in a corner of my heart,
as my life wasted away
in remote solitude.

“That feeling unveiled itself
on the field of battle,
speaking out loudly from
every sweet wound in my body.

“I remained alert, cinching tight
the belt of self-control,
yet helplessly attracted
by the lure of tenderness.

“I did not know its strength
overpowering my feelings,
a lasting flame burning
in the depth of my heart.

“I came here to fight as
commander of valiant Duryodhan -
I did not come to Kurukshetra
to die for the sake of love.

“Really, my respect is great
for Arjun's skill as an archer,
joy overwhelming my mind
at the sight of him in action.

“The welfare of the Pāndavas
was my heart's desire,
my body a mercenary
in the hands of Duryodhan.

“Love snatched its own treasures
as justice would demand.
He who rules the heart
gets also the body.

“If immortal love had
guided me from the beginning,
this country may not have seen
this day of Kurukshetra.

“Yudhisthir! Shamefully neglecting
the tender feelings of my heart,
I too pushed the world
to the battle front.

“I took a hard oath to discipline
the firey restlessness of youth,
blocking and removing
all feelings of affection.

“I could not believe that love
is more attractive than beauty,
the glow of tenderness is better
than the radiance of a vow.

“A bow in my hand, a quiver on my back,
awareness of justice in my mind -
I could not see
the more beautiful side of my life.

“When that unknown feeling
awoke in my heart,
it was forced to bow down
before morality and duty.

“My heart was always frustrated
by the actions of Duryodhan,
but the sense of duty always
prevailed in my mind.

“Leaving the strength of discipline
in the hands of duty,
I was a slave in my own house,
commanded by the whim of others.

“My intellect ruled my life
and my heart became a slave,
trembling with fright at the thought
of speaking openly.

“My heart could not tell me:
 'Bhīshma, why are you swept away?
 A torch-bearer of justice,
 how can you tolerate injustice?'

“With your love of the Pāṇdavas,
 while serving the Kauravas -
 how can you act at all
 with such divided devotion?

“The fierce enmity of Duryodhan
 against the Pāṇdavas
 was transformed in me
 into a conflict between mind and body.

“Confusing me, my intellect
 did not allow me to act
 and place all my might
 on the altar of my heart.

“My reason showed me a dream
 where enmity could vanish by itself,
 telling me: “Who is foe and
 who is friend in this world?

“If you take sides and act
 then the courage of many will falter,
 there will be a dreadful revolt
 and order and balance will disappear”.

“Sometimes, it inspired my bravery,
 and prevented my return to the forest.
 It stopped me in many ways
 from reaching my cherished goal.

“Today, I am troubled:
If I had not followed its advice,
If I had recognised love
in the form of real justice,

“If I had washed away the dirt of politics
with the water of my love,
If I had succeeded in yoking together
force and pure compassion,

“If I had stood up to write
with my pen for arrows
the story my tongue failed to write
on the heart of power,

“If I had succeeded in liberating my heart
from the rule of my intellect,
If I had shown compassion for the oppressed,
coming down from my seat of power,

“If I had challenged Duryodhan,
taking the side of justice,
holding high the flag of revolt
and furthering its cause,

“Then, fear-struck Duryodhan
might have moved with caution.
Then the land of Bharat
might have been saved from war.

“Now all is over, nothing remains, let the story go on,
Forget the past, let a new age come upon the world.

Let me have peace, let me have that reward at least
before I leave on my journey,
For I have both duty and love, I rely on both.”

CANTO FIVE

1

Muse! I am distressed in these times of transition,
 I am Dvāpar³⁰ and face the age of Kali coming.
 I looked for shade in a scorching world,
 confident that I was coming into history.

Alas! Even here the sky is burning in flames,
 blasting waves of fire rushing in the air,
 an uproar gushing forth from the cave of time,
 gigantic heat rising up from tormented seas.

deafening sounds of burning wood in the forest,
 frightening volcanoes blazing eruptions -
 What is this smell of blood seeping out from history?
 Who is burning? From whence this horrible smoke?

A spear has pierced the heart of the frightened earth.
 Whose victorious red flag is fluttering in the air?
 Who is dancing with a blood-drenched body, stretching
 forth a greedy tongue, holding a sword of destruction?

What is running here? Is it horses or the pride of man?
 Is it only a rite or the senseless ruin of the world?
 That what is stored in a vessel by the might of swords,
 is it a river's water or a river of human blood?

What is it the helpless kings are enduring?
 Is it a sacrificial gift? Or pearls of honour?
 Are the offerings burning in pits of oil?
 Or are they feeding on the egotism of defeated kings?

³⁰ At the end of the Dvāpar age the Mahābhārat conflict took place. Then followed the Kali age.

Are the priests reciting Vedas or performing rituals?
 Are they pacifying or arousing the fire of life?
 Is the black smoke the image of a victor's fame
 Or the helpless anger of a king emitting smoke?

Are these the words of blessing or new blazing flames?
 Is it a sacrificial bath or a bath in blood?
 The red mark shining on the forehead of the king -
 is it sacred paste or someone's bloody revenge?

The poet's pen is moving with the sword,
 writing in mad praise of the deadly fire.
 Hatred came back from the war triumphantly -
 O Muse! A woman messenger came from your house,

Holding the plate of homage in her hand,
 reciting welcome songs in her melodious voice.
 She began to sing and dance for *ārtī*,
 showering flowers on the god of destruction.

Wiping bloodstains from his body with the hem of her sari,
 adorning his body in many different ways,
 giving him a high place in her heart and
 praising his valour, she made him immortal in her songs.

Defeated in war, malice turned into ashes,
 the spark that won the war was adored.
 True, when its shape is transformed by victory
 the stigma of killing is blown away.

Who can balance victory against sorrow?
 Who can search his heart with closed eyes and ears?
 If killing even one man is a sin,
 how can killing millions be a virtue?

Respectful to all in times of peace,
 Not killing people at random,
 How can a person at war forget all restraints
 And usurp the right to kill others?

One wise man in the womb of time
 stands upright, tears flowing from his eyes.
 He crushes bloodstained pride under his feet,
 lighting the lamp of compassion in his heart.

The shy Maiden of victory stands before him,
 welcoming him with flower garlands.
 Yudhisthir has no understanding,
 he cannot recognize the beautiful girl.

His body stands on earth, but
 his mind has risen to limitless heights
 where hatred has not reached and even
 the hard iron of time melts away,

 where man moves without attachment
 and has no fear of others.
 That fearless kingdom of faith and peace,
 where evil greed is not found.

Where compassion rules every mind,
 where affection and justice are in control.
 Where self-sacrifice and the life of a beggar
 is better than hurting and killing people.

Where there are no heated passions,
 no curse of war on the heads of men.
 Where life grows in the shade of equality
 and lamps of nectar are lit in every house.

Oh Victory! Your clothes are drenched in blood.
 Are your teeth different from those of death?
 Flames gleam on the hem of your sari,
 the smoke of destruction is rising from your black hair.

You are the all devouring serpent of Kurukshetra!
 Wipe the red stains of blood from your face,
 You are running after Yudhishthir, but
 he is looking for another sweet fruit.

Look there, high in the endless sky,
 he is flying on a wavelike spell of joy
 to bring to earth a river of nectar brimming
 with streams of equality, the pure waters of love.

Real peace will rise in this dream, in a world
 liberated from the shackles of death.
 Agony will grow in the mind of the victors,
 with streams of compassion flowing from their eyes.

The victor will weep as he discovers the meaning of killing,
 washing with tears the clots of blood from his body.
 A path will be cleared for the victory of free men
 and fortune will dawn for the frightened earth.

Daughter of destruction, mad maiden of victory!
 For whom is the marriage garland held in your hands?
 The men raising swords are gone,
 the king now present gives up his kingdom.

You cannot seize him with your bloodstained body,
 you cannot arouse a saint with your amorous arrows.
 Never will you hold his hand,
 for this sacred soil is far from your home.

When this wanderer of the skies returns,
 when the ascetic comes from the land of renunciation,
 your wanton looks will have gone,
 the flowers of your garland will wither.

2

The intellect may try to console the heart,
 but nature will go on taking revenge.

The heart may be silent in defeat,
 but cruel agony never comes to an end.

A ruined, agonised and deserted land
 stretches before the eyes -
 how can it be hidden
 from eyes that are watching?

This never ending tale flowed
 from the mouth of Bhīshma,
 and Yudhisthir, listening, burst into tears.

“It's all over, Grandfather, nothing is left -
 before me I only see a land of death.

“The weary, mighty god of death himself has fallen
 like a dreadful huge corpse, still and silent.

“Earth, the compassionate mother,
 lies grim, drowned in grief
 holding mangled corpses
 on her bloodstained lap.

“The wind flees swiftly away holding its nose
 suffocated by the poisonous stench.

“The frightened winter sun is setting,
 spreading his rays,
 while the moon glides on silently,
 hiding her face in the clouds.

“Crows, eagles, dogs, jackals and hordes of wild cats -

guests of the death god prowl expectantly,
beholding the abundant food before their eyes.

“The son of Manu³¹ has become the food of beasts!
 Such is the end of man!
 Alas! This is the fortune of the heroes of Bharat!

“Mighty arms hanging like ropes
 on either side of the body,
 “Once they were garlands on a beloved's neck
 now they have caused the death of the enemy.

“These great, indomitable, mighty wings of the eagle-god
 are now eaten by dogs and jackals of the jungle.

“The head now torn by the beaks of crows,
 was once the treasure of greatness,
 the abode of dreams.

“A kite tears up and devours the breast of a poet,
 once so sober and filled with love.

“Innumerable men have been slain,
 the rarest of crowns have been destroyed.

“Illustrious and fearless men,
 the treasures of shining valour,
 embodiment of art and science,
 knowledge and righteousness -

“Have been sacrificed on the altar of war.
 A helpless and poor mother earth
 returned from Kurukshetra,
 deprived of her diamond sons.

“Brilliance, charm and splendour
 have left with Duryodhan,
 only a dry skeleton
 is left with me, the sinner.

“A dry skeleton, the curse, the memory sting of the dead,
 a dry skeleton, the grief of the mind of the living.

“A dry skeleton, the symbol of Yudhisthir's victory,

³¹ Manu, in Hindu mythology, is considered the progenitor of mankind.

a dry skeleton, a peerless gift of the Mahābhārat.

“On earth the wounded scream,
the sky is filled with piteous wails.

“In that great land only dust remains,
flowers of splendour burnt and turned to ashes.

Only this is left from doom,
a snakebitten land on the verge of death.
This gift is left here for me
in the abode of the goddess of wealth.

“All the heroes have left with Duryodhan,
a corpse filled country is left behind.
The cries of compassionate Mother earth remain,
the attire of young war widows remains.
Peaceful happiness, love and mirth have gone,
endless pathos and grief remain.
Heaps of ashes are left behind in the hands of fate
for the sake of the victors.

“The war is over, but alas! Even now
the dismayed earth is trembling with fear.
The shadow of doom has spread
on the faces of men and women.
Earth and sky are drowned in grief,
a grim gloom has spread everywhere.
We do not know. Is this earth
living or lying dead?

“It is a graveyard, Grandfather! Look!
Ghosts of affluence are coming towards me -
they are singing songs of praise
and garlanding Duryodhan from all sides.
Exhibiting the gutted and mangled
bodies of the dead with mocking gestures.
Hear their sounds of mockery and laughter,
teasing me with their merriment.

“They say: 'Yudhisthir! You boasted about
 your saintliness and virtue.
 You gave sermons to all on meditation,
 sacrifice, forgiveness and compassion.
 You shared the grief of others
 advancing ahead at all times.
 You stayed in the forest for the sake of *dharma*,
 leaving your home and riches.

“Was it a real or deceitful detachment
 of a man who possessed no strength,
 Who was assembling armies by his deeds,
 arousing compassion among the people?
 Was there endurance in you?
 Or a flame of revenge burning secretly?
 Was it *dharma* or a deceitful falsehood
 only to conceal your greed?

“When the minds of people were turning towards you,
 when popular leaders began to assemble at your side.
 Compassion began to leave you,
 revengeful thoughts began to torment you.
 The Pāndavas began to show their real nature,
 dropping the garments of devotion and sacrifice.
 Ruin began to hover above in the sky,
 clouds of war began to thunder.

“Your grief and the glee of Duryodhan -
 they always displeased you!
 Tell me the truth, are you burning in jealousy
 seeing the valour of Duryodhan, the king of the Kurus?
 Hiding a vicious fire under their meditation and saintliness
 have not the Pāndavas deceived the world?
 Furious flames of revenge were in their minds,
 but outwardly, they appeared to be repentant.

“When the fire of war broke out,
 what sin did you not commit?
 You lied to kill your teacher³²,
 you cut off his head in a moment of trance.
 You changed the rules of the battle
 treacherously breaking the thigh of Duryodhan³³
 Oh Sinner! You drank blood smilingly
 ripping open the chest of a dying man³⁴.

“Why do you not embrace that
 for which you committed these sins?
 Why do you trample victory under your feet?
 Why does Draupadī not frighten you anymore?
 Why do you not joyfully choose
 what Duryodhan enjoys?
 Oh victor of Kurukshetra, tell me -
 why do you not ascend the throne?

“Who stops you? Let the Pāndavas
 wear the crowns happily on their heads.
 Let them roam about with heads raised in joy
 leaving the fear of Duryodhan behind.
 They can get all the happiness they desire,
 they can fill their treasury and granary in joy.
 Where are the heroes to oppose them?
 Let them happily rule the widows of war.

“True, Grandfather, the widowed earth,
 the wife of the valiant is weeping.
 Breaking her bangles, wiping
 the marriage mark from her forehead.
 See the blatant injustice of victory,
 as she becomes a drunken demoness.
 She makes preparations for the marriage
 of distressed widows with a burning funeral pyre.

³² This refers to the deceit of Yudhisthir who told his guru Dron that Dron's son Ashvattham had died. This was not true and in that moment of grief and weakness Dron was killed.

³³ Hitting the thigh was against the military code of conduct.

³⁴ Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāndav brothers, had been shamelessly dragged by the hair into the court of Duryodhan and dishonoured by Dushāsana, the second of the 100 Kaurav brothers. Her second son, Bhīma, vowed that he would kill Dushāsana and as an act of revenge would drink the blood from his chest. On the sixteenth day of the epic battle Bhīma killed Dushāsana and fulfilled his vow.

“How can I console the weeping widow,
 lifting her from the ground?
 How can I give her solace, taking her into my lap,
 while the funeral pyre of her husband is burning?
 I will not give up my remaining fame
 by showing attachment to riches.
 I am stigmatised for waging war,
 I will not prolong it.

“Grandfather! Had I known at the beginning
 that wealth is the ultimate goal of this war.
 Had I recognised this greed, hidden in me
 at the time of our exile in the woods,
 I would not have heeded the words of Draupadī
 or the advice of Lord Krishna himself.
 Grandfather, I know for sure
 I would not have waged war at all.

“Alas! I was under the magic spell of that night,
 the divine dawn of today was not there.
 In the mist of illusion and in dense darkness
 bright wisdom did not blossom in my mind.
 Greed for wealth incited me,
 not only my fierce anger.
 Alas, Grandfather! I was not aware
 of the horrible truth awaiting me.

“When the army marched, it did not occur to me
 in what direction I was going.
 What principle I was sacrificing
 when I ruined the country.
 From where did I get the inspiration for war?
 From the royal treasure of the Kurus
 or from Draupadī's disheveled hair?
 Did I march only to take revenge
 or was I yearning for pleasures?

“Taking revenge was a false pretext,
 in reality we wanted to find happiness.
 We wanted to make Duryodhan burn in jealousy,
 by building a grand royal court.
 Man always wants to hide his greed
 under the flame of his pride.
 He fights out of greed,
 under the false pretext of revenge.

“When the aim of revenge is completed,
 what satisfaction do we need?
 We have no anger towards the survivors,
 three great warriors³⁵ on the side of the Kauravas.
 We wanted to spread the message that
 we had no fault in fighting our enemies.
 Will the treasure and splendour of the Kauravas
 drown us in the mire of sin?

“All people will say, in vanity
 Yudhisthir took the pledge of saintliness.
 He became engrossed in evil, when he could not
 bear the misery of meditation and sacrifice.
 Thoughtlessly, he killed men
 for the sake of trivial pleasures.
 Unfaithful to his pledge of compassion,
 he deserves the punishments of hell.

“Grandfather! Weigh the war of universal destruction
 against the insult of a handful of men.
 Tell us the secret: where lies
 the greatest and most deadly sin?
 Have pity on me, humble and distressed, Grandfather,
 do not falter in the truth.
 Tell us, who was responsible for this slaughter of men?
 Was it Duryodhan or the armies of Yudhisthir?

³⁵ Only three warriors, Kripāchārya, Kritavarma and Ashvatthma survived the battle.

“Seeing Duryodhan firm in his resolve
 should I abandon my vow?
 Should I also fall in that poisonous mire
 where he is already caught?
 He stood with a sword in his hand,
 should I keep a dagger in mine?
 Should I avenge the insult to Draupadī,
 and destroy the country in a moment?

“Should the entire earth perish,
 because someone insulted another?
 Should the entire world burn,
 because someone's arrow was loosed against another?
 Should the egotism of all be enkindled,
 because of one man's egotism?
 Should men stampede like sacrificial animals
 when someone beats the drums of war?

“Do not praise it as the radiance of strength -
 it is the painful fever of war.
 It is the demonic flame in the heart of man,
 a dreadful fire of emotion.
 It is darkness of the mind -
 in illusion men cannot see the truth.
 When the Kuru dynasty was caught in the fire
 they thought their own houses were burning.

“Why did the world not hold back,
 when two men were seen fighting one another?
 May the world let those die,
 who want to kill each other.
 Without thinking, compassionate men
 spill their blood in war.
 Remaining neutral, they will not even pour water
 to extinguish the fire of war.

“The Kurukshetra war has come to an end now,
 only we five and three Kauravas are left alive.
 Most of the people have died and the wounded,
 lame, crippled and helpless survive.
 No one gained a thing. Everyone lost everything.
 Only misery is left behind.
 Alas! Only the Pāndavas survived, usurping
 the royal throne of the Kuru dynasty.

“Now I know, that royal throne only
 was the root cause of this war.
 Now I recognise the cobra of greed
 concealed in the hair of Draupadī.
 Now I admit that this greed
 robbed the light from my inner eye.
 How can I be victorious as long as that lives?
 Now, I must declare a new war.

“A great war against passion,
 where Yudhisthir will win victory.
 The war ravaged creeping vine of human culture
 will bear the sweet divine fruit of peace.
 The dust of Kurukshetra is not the end of the path -
 man will go far beyond it.
 The son of Manu will not be disappointed,
 a new light of worldorder will be lit.

CANTO SIX

When will the light of righteousness,
 the lamp of compassion
 be lit in this world, oh God?
 When will the thirsty scorched earth
 be lush again in a flood of tender light?

Nectar has flowed over the earth in plenty,
 but still the earth is not pleasant.
 Greed and selfishness are dominant,
 feelings of detachment have no power.

We had the great Bhīshma, Yudhisthir and Lord Krishna,
 Buddha, Ashoka, Christ and Gandhi:
 bowing his head, man accepts them
 as greater than himself.
 His homage is only words,
 while he goes on hating and hurting others.
 He does not leave his old ways.

He goes on plundering, exploiting and cheating,
 he walks on corpses to reach his goal.
 He raises the sword of madness time and again,
 unable to solve problems in a friendly way.
 The same passion for rebellion today,
 the same serpent in his heart.

Life today is not as miserable as ever,
 the world has come a long way after Dvāpar.
 This is the age of science: competent and complete,
 many secrets of creation disclosed.
 The world has reached a new land of light,
 going through darkness
 with hands on the rudder of the intellect.

The world of today is new and unique,
 man has conquered nature everywhere.
 Water, steam and electricity are powers in his hands,
 heated air goes up and down as he commands.
 There are no obstacles anywhere.
 Man crosses mountains and rivers and seas at will.

Obeying his orders as in great reverence,
 all the elements of nature are subject to him:
 even the god of rain obeys his order,
 as the sky conveys his message.

Time and space are held fast
 in the giant fist of modern man.

Boundless is that progress,
 peerless the development of man!
 The earth is under his feet,
 the entire sky in his fist!

Only the intellect
 has grown without fetters,
 the land of feelings
 is left far behind.
 Man organizes ever new festivals for the intellect,
 while the grief stricken gods cry in his soul.

The gods never wanted knowledge alone, they ask
 for surrender and love,
 for an offering as soft as wax that melts
 in the heat created by the mind,
 for tender flowers in the charred forest of the soul,
 for a soft stream of feelings in the desert of knowledge,
 for the melody of moonlight, for the smile of dawn,
 for the song of a river forgotten in sleep,
 for the kingdom of a bud blossoming in colours,
 for the echo of dewdrops dripping from leaves,
 for the picture melting in the pain of tears,
 for a garland of flowers drenched in nectar,
 for the refreshing waters of a slowly moving stream,

far away from smoke and weariness, tumult and dust,
 for the shade of a tree where the mind can rest,
 where man can be at leisure in the evening
 and turn into his self
 away from the madding crowd,

to open his heart like a flower,
 to weigh his earnings at the end of the day.

Now the body gets the greatest share of joy,
 but the gods ask an abode for the heart.

Oh man, you are the slave of destiny,
 son of Manu, you are a mockery to yourself!

You conquered the secrets of nature,
 frightening those that dwell in the seas and skies,
 controlling all creation with your mind,
 splitting the invincible and boundless atom,
 but helplessly flying off on the winds of your mind.

In what direction are you going,
 so desperately?

What is your aim?

What is your goal?

What is your purpose?

If you do not know,
 the labour of your science is wasted!

You climb into the skies,
 listening to the sounds of planets and stars,
 but fail to remember one simple thing.

One simple thing, one clear thing:
 the night of greed has spread all over the world.

Lost in the dark night of greed,
 man is devouring his own race.
 He has the fragrance of the skies in his mind,
 but the blood in his veins is like mud.
 He is a god with his words,
 a wretched beast with his deeds.

The planes of man pierce the skies,
 before his hands the atoms shiver in fear,
 to him the mountains, oceans and skies
 opening their hearts have told their secrets.
 All veils have been removed,
 what is there yet to be learned?
 But man needs barriers difficult to conquer,
 new conflicts to reflect on and act,
 new ambitions to subdue new lands.

All the earth is now discovered and is boring,
 it is a tiny fruit in his hands.
 An old book gives him no new inspiration,
 all its pages have been read.

Man's intellect is dynamic and unbounded,
 it cannot take rest even for a moment.
 Is anything new left for him to contemplate
 on this tested earth, in this old volume?
 It is a small planet, its horizon is narrow,
 man needs another, a new universe.

His intellect is suffocating,
 it wants a bigger world, a bigger sky.
 The earth now is too small and man
 wants to conquer distant planets.
 He is now an expert in science,
 he may talk to the moon and to Mars.

He is the most brilliant light in the universe,
 earth and sky cannot hide anything from him.
 His unbounded flame is adored
 with reverence by the entire creation.
 He is the jewel of creation,
 a treasure of light, science and knowledge.

Inhabitants of Mars, listen to me!
 This creature that is trying to reach you,
 is an animal, a blood-thirsty beast:
 its mind is demonic and shallow.
 Whenever the greed of one man explodes,
 the mad horns of death are blown.

This scientific man is worse than jackals and dogs,
 his deeds are wicked and dirty.
 Not only his body, also his mind and soul fight -
 all arts and sciences are used for destruction.
 All the fruits of research become thunderbolts,
 forgetting what they are meant for.

Man, the treasury of knowledge!
 Man, the beauty of the universe!
 Don't be misled by these titles, look at his actions:
 he is the servant of destruction, the slave of greed.
 His genius is deception, his knowledge hypocrisy,
 man is the greatest insult to humanity itself.

He knows everything from the earth to the skies,
 but that is not his identity, not his true credential.
 His credentials lie in the victory
 of his enlightened heart over his mind,
 in his unbounded love for others.
 Only he is wise and a scholar and a man,
 who breaks down barriers among men.

But that creature with the restless mind,
 that breaks atoms but not the heart's barriers
 is not a man. He may be more,
 or less, or something different,
 a unique creature from some unknown planet,
 a part of the world of Mars or Saturn,
 a stranger thinking only about those planets.

The credentials of man on this nectareous earth
 are not his science, his inflammable intellect,
 the curse of blind knowledge on an illusive path,
 that burns and kills and grieves creation.

The curiosity of his intellect is only a strange magic,
 his great inventions are not to his credit.

Beware, man! If your science is a sword,
 throw it away, leave all attachments.
 All know you are still an ignorant child,
 you cannot discern thorns from flowers.
 You cannot play with a sword in your hand,
 you will cut yourself, its edge is too sharp.

The credentials of man on this nectareous earth
 are not his science, bitter and inflammable.
 His credentials lie in the gentle breeze of love in his soul,
 when he lays down his life for others.

His credentials lie in the flow of tears,
 in the compassionate call of a broken lyre,
 in the song from the world of divine emotions,
 in his journey on the path of light.

His credentials lie in the burning fire of penance,
 in renunciation and sacrifice,
 in the bliss of his mind, like cream after churning,
 that makes life smooth, gentle and pure,
 in making a gift of his science
 making the results a present to all,
 in the inventions of human welfare that make
 the happiness of nature everybody's share.
 The misuse of man's labour must be stopped,
 nature should serve systems that bring happiness.

Man's true self lies in his quest for the order of equality,
in his building a new world based on justice and love,
in his strong and undaunted faith in others.

A man with a bright and new history
without war, exploitation and decadence,
where not a page will be dirty or burnt.

The history of man will be a lake of nectar,
rippling with the happiness of all.

The earth will be freed from the fever of war,
and filled with the nectar of truth.

Man's true self appears when all are sound and healthy,
when the earth is no longer red with the blood of man,
when the boundless light of *dharma* promotes goodness
and man is at peace with one and all.

When will the soft and generous rays of equality
shine in this world, my Lord?

When will all the creatures on this charred earth
be showered in tender light?

CANTO SEVEN

Burning like gold in the fire of love,
 drowned in a sea of darkness,
 man advances towards light,
 struggling like a lotus to rise above the mud,
 floating like the moon on waves of clouds.

Victory to man, fallen into the deep pit of sin,
 to the simple and innocent son of Manu, born of light!
 Millions of saints cannot match that man, whose ray of light
 has not become a slave of darkness accepting defeat.

The earth does not live with those that are scared of the land,
 it is alive with those who turn it into gold.
 The yogī runs away from the world burning amidst five-fold fires,
 the detached seeker of pleasure heats the world for its fragrance.

Here, the path leading to the land of light
 passes through darkness.
 Dawn comes every day ascending on the head of darkness.
 Who is he, who was not caught in the prison of sin,
 whose clothes are not drenched in the stream of Styx?

Whose path is bright from beginning to end,
 unable to break the bond of darkness? Who is so helpless?
 Both the sun and the moon fear the slippery path of life.
 Eclipsed, they go on like unswallowed morsels.

Rising and falling on the path, full of ups and downs,
 walking on earth, often ascending on the chariot of virtue,
 fighting hard with sinful and remorseful darkness,
 the valiant man advances towards the land of light.

As long as there are tears in the eyes of man,
 and stories of evil make man burn within
 and man's desire for moral strength survives -
 the hope of humanity will not be lost in man.

This hope blossoms on both sin and virtue,
 it can also be found in the ashes of Kurukshetra.
 He who has hope is the only builder of virtuous *dharma*,
 the servant, friend and leader of men.

At last, Yudhisthir had this hope, lamenting and
 cleaning his impatient heart with flowing tears.
 Seeing his dejected grandson near the land of action,
 Bhīshma spoke to him,
 echoing the very feelings of his heart.

“The dust of Kurukshetra is not the end of the human path,
 let tears rain here, let the peace-flower bloom.

“Yudhisthir, look! The Dvāpar period is coming to an end,
 the ocean is reabsorbing one of its waves.
 A piece of time is leaving the world
 taking abundant ashes of funeral pyres with it.
 The tomb of this age is built in the dust of the coming age,
 a perennial stream of life flows on even today.
 Only the dead past has rested in the lap of death,
 coming closer, the future invites man.

“Only the broken parts of the land vanished here,
 the destiny of man was not burnt in this war.
 Man is drowned in blood, not humanity
 hiding in the mind leaving the body.
 Man has hope in man, but, Yudhisthir! Don't search for it
 in the woods, leaving the world of men.
 Hope for humanity lies in the cries of the victor,
 there is hope for man in your tears.

“Man charged with passion will be driven
 towards war, his mind always detached.
 Man moans in his mind and fate
 uses his body in the act of destruction.
 His arrogant lust makes him smile in revenge,
 but the loss of humanity scars his mind.
 Humanity moves forward turbulantly making its way
 between the banks of detachment and lust.

“If you can rise high, you find humanity is greater
 than crowns, kingdoms, meditation, yoga and sacrifice.
 There are no valid norms, here, to distinguish -
 every man is equal to the other.
 A man without strength and wealth is
 like a man who is wealthy and strong.
 There is no difference in the life
 that man has obtained from nature.

“But, ascending a peak he could not
 see the immortality and equality in life.
 Even now, men have no belief in others,
 even now they are scared of each other.
 This suspicious man is always pouring
 malice, hatred and poison in the mind of others.
 Men have always made progress
 quarrelling and fighting one another.

“Millions of heroes and saints have searched
 for the welfare of man throughout their lives.
 In this pursuit oceans were churned
 and many arrows of knowledge were shot.
 In this pursuit men were caught in the mire of sin
 and men have sacrificed themselves.
 In this pursuit men have renounced everything
 and waged destructive wars.

“To find this, hero, light the light of pure knowledge,
 go beyond the burial-ground of Kurukshetra.
 Become detached amidst attachment,
 a sage with royal sceptre,
 by your sacrifice show the path to man.
 Give human feelings to the down-trodden,
 put out the evil fire of pride and strength.
 Put the fire of feeling in snow-cold thought,
 remove venom from the unbridled pride.

“If you want to stop war, remove your poison teeth,
 liberate the earth from the fear of tigers and wolves.
 Turn sacrificial lambs into tigers,
 put deadly poison into their teeth.
 Give all plants the boon of spreading,
 shivering with cold under the huge Banyan tree.
 Cut the branches and veins of that frightening tree
 that is sucking up all the sap of the earth.

“Yudhisthir! This earth is not
 anyone's bought maid-servant.
 All its inhabitants
 are born equally.

“Everyone has the right to drink
 the life-giving juice of the soil,
 to live in the world peacefully
 without fearing shortage.

“Everybody needs free light,
 everybody needs free air,
 everybody needs unblocked progress
 and a life, free from fear.

“All men want to fly freely
like birds in the sky
and to search in every way for
their full development in the world.

“Still there are many obstacles
on this path,
mountains stand
blocking the way of man.

“As long as reasonable happiness
is not available to all,
where can relief be on this earth,
how can peace come in this world?

“As long as one man's share of happiness
is not equal to that of another,
the tumult will not be reduced,
the struggle will not diminish.

“There was a natural and easy path
of sharing to reach total happiness.
Not the path of stealing
happiness only for oneself.

“Forgetting that all are caught
in suspicion and fear of others,
men are engaged in piling up
individual pleasure.

“A stream of poison gushed out
from that personal pleasure-seeking.
Diving into it, human society
is suffering an unbearable pain.

“There are endless pleasures on earth,
 bestowed by the grace of God.
 How many persons on earth now
 can enjoy all these gifts?

“Water, from the earth to the sky
 cannot be exhausted.
 Light and air, at any time
 cannot diminish.

This earth gives flowers and fruits,
 food, wealth and diamonds.
 Unique dense forests are the kingdom
 of animals and birds.

“High mountain peaks are
 filled with gems and diamonds.
 In vast oceans coral and
 pearls are scattered.

“Man is again and again
 curious and inquisitive.
 His powerful and competent arms
 can churn all oceans!

“His ever-searching intellect
 probes even in the dark
 and reveals new secrets
 and new forms of nature.

“Who can withstand this arm,
 this intellect of man?
 What is the splendour that is
 beyond the reach of man?

So much splendour overflows
 from the treasure of nature
 that all men and women can have
 their fill of joy and pleasure.

“All can be satisfied, all
 can have equal happiness,
 If people want, they can in a moment
 turn this earth into a paradise.

“God has hidden all tht is needed
 under the cover of nature -
 Enterprising man brings them
 to light with his struggle.

“Man did not come here
 his fate all arranged by Brahmā -
 He found his happiness
 with the strength of his arms.

“Nature does not bow in fear
 of the strength of fate.
 It is defeated by the enterprise
 and the labour of man.

“Only idle men wait
 for the dictate of Brahmā.
 The valiant erase the evil written on their faces
 with the sweat of their brow.

“Fatalism is the cover of sin,
 a weapon of exploitation
 to suppress and rob
 what belongs to another.

“Ask the fatalist, if
 the writ of fate is so important,
 why does the earth not cast
 its diamonds at the feet of man?

“Why does he produce wealth
 by irrigating nature?
 Why does he take his treasures
 by the might of his fortune?

“Accumulating wealth in
 his previous birth,
 in whose house did he
 leave his earnings?

“Where was the man born
 who rules today?
 Is this house really his
 wealth from that deposit?

“Ask him, when he collected wealth
 for the first time,
 which system of fatalism there was
 behind his grasping?

“The same exploitation of the labour of man,
 the same unjustifiable milking,
 the same dirty deceit of human society,
 the same remorseful earning.

“One man accumulates wealth
 by the strength of sin,
 another enjoys it
 by the deceit of fatalism.

“The fortune of human society
 is its labour, the strength of its arms,
 before which the earth bows down
 and the sky becomes humble.

“Do not allow him who did the hard work
 to stay behind
 from conquered nature -
 Let him get happiness first.

“All the wealth vested in nature
 is the wealth of man.
 Yudhisthir! Every man is the owner
 of its every atom.

“Had the rights of man
 been protected in a natural way,
 the shape of the world would be
 very different today.

“Labour would be a valuable treasure,
 all men would earn well.
 No one would be frightened of shortage
 and all would have their fill of happiness.

“There would be no king and no subject,
 but only human beings.
 No writ of fortune on the face,
 only hands that work.

“For whom then is the king?
 Who is the subject, and of whom?
 Only the distorted man
 has created this bondage.

“As every one gets air and water today,
 without any hindrance,
 once even the land was accessible
 to one and all.

“Man used to love man,
 and have faith in one another.
 Renunciation was the rule and people
 were saints lost in their work.

“People lived bound
 by the bond of righteousness,
 sharing each other's sorrow
 with smiles on their lips.

“No difference between great and small,
 all were equal.
 Human society was like a family
 where everyone loved each other.

“All worked in high spirits
 and ate at leisure.
 No one ever claimed that
 he was distinct from another.

“All were bound with a common bond
 no one was left behind.
 The happiness of one man was not
 different from that of another.

“There was no desire in anyone
 to grasp for himself
 and to fill his own house
 by stealing the food of others.

“No kings and no subjects were there,
there was no rule.
There was a moral discipline
in the mind of every man.

“Is the ownership of man now protected
by the long arm of the law?
Once it was respected gladly
by all moral-minded persons.

“The path of life was straight,
free on all sides.
There were no walls of royal rules
blocking the way at every step.

“Man reached his cherished goal
with the greatest ease.
He climbed the peak
of progress without any fear.

“Then the thought of decay came,
the mind of man turned to greed,
the poison of greed began to spread
and hid in the soul of man.

“One day a famine came and men died,
the minds of people turned around,
the greed of man began to speak
from a hidden corner of his heart.

“Alas! If you had not gathered possessions
only for yourself,
you would not have lamented
in the crisis of today.

“This great danger may not have fallen
on you and on others.
Get up, fool! Get ready
for the future, now.

“Yes, then man rose
frightened by remorse.
He started to accumulate wealth
hiding it from the eyes of others.

“When one man went to one side
all followed him that way.
All men and women then took a side,
preparing to defend themselves.

“The cobra of greed vomited venom,
theft and plunder started,
exploitation, attack and beating,
grabbing, scrambling and looting.

“The entire order of society
was scattered,
the poor earth began to drown
in the tumultuous uproar.

“The sword came to put out
the world-devouring flames,
to bind the serpent
of the greed of man.

“A valorous man holding a sword
a demon in human form,
With the club of force
he became the ruler of men.

“Individuals left society
to be happy but fell
into the deep pit of slavery,
unknowingly.

“The natural love of man for man
would not have vanished from the world,
if he had stopped deceiving
his own kinsmen.

“If the faith of man had remained
steadfast in others,
if he had not forgotten others
when his thoughts were happy,

“If he had remembered that he is
only a man, not more not less,
the wise descendant of Manu,
different from animals and birds,

“Man would not have been willing
to forget his honour and happiness,
to become a humble slave
of royal authority.

“Man who could not accept
the natural and tender bond of love,
is now held in the iron grip
of a dreadful rule of force.

“That man, who could not share
a portion of his pleasure,
is giving it today
for fear of the royal sword.

“Neglecting the tender feelings
of truth and justice,
today man is learning
the language of the sword.

“What will be a greater fall
of the human race than this?
Speak out! What will be a greater insult
to the honour of man?

“Human society needs a strong king
holding a sword in his hand,
to frighten outrageous
and barbaric man.

“A king is needed, for men
will fight among themselves.
A sword is needed, for men
are not afraid of justice.

“A king is needed, who makes them
walk like a flock of sheep,
who keeps them away from injustice,
teaching them morality at every step.

“Men need a king, who can
understand their stupidity,
who always sprinkles
water on their burning disputes.

“A king is needed, lest
men keep fighting.
They will be drowned in their blood,
fighting and killing.

“Kingship is the symbol of the dirty,
 inferior nature of man.
 The remorse of humanity
 the contemptible disgrace of culture.

“The king has come only to stop
 the ever increasing vices of men,
 not to tie down the virtues
 of free men.

“Look, now the pattern of thought
 is also determined.
 Not only deeds, but also the mind
 is controlled by royal decree.

Krishna or Vidur³⁶, the same rule
 is applied to all.
 A system of discipline
 on all thoughts, words and deeds.

If the actions of even these
 are not pleasing to those in command,
 they are like blades of grass,
 nothing in the eyes of the king.

“The only aim of rule
 is to protect what is there -
 The stream of life cannot flow
 to a new land.

“Nowhere can anyone speak up
 against the rules,
 no one can freely disclose the secret
 of a new religion without fear.

³⁶ Vidur was a famous minister of the Kaurav brothers.

“Man wanders in the world
forgetting his own form,
bearing the heavy and deadly stone
of a vicious system around his neck.

“He could not control
his own mind steadily
and installed an armed guard
to protect his life.

“Today, this guard
does not let him move
or allow his human form
to rise from traditional bondage.

“Man himself made this possible
through his own bad deeds,
quarrelling with others, he
gave all respect to the ruler.

If the rock of man's selfishness
cannot be crushed,
the sword-holding guard
will not leave society.

“Man is perverted. A king, the bearer
of the righteous banner is needed.
Kingship is contemptible and gigantic
is the duty of the king.

“Yudhisthir! The search for asceticism
is cowardice of the mind.
Real humanity is loosening
the bondage of life.

“It is not impossible for man
to find personal happiness.
It is very hard to make
millions of people happy.

“Leaving the world there is one path
where you can be lost in yourself,
where you can search for salvation
finding your own happiness.

“On the second path you can reach heaven
from this world
along with many others, giving them
the power of wisdom.

“Through meditation
acquiring personal happiness
you can remove the sorrow
of innumerable men.

“Keeping the secret of meditation for yourself,
speak, is that justice?
Is that the way to grant the gift
of heaven to the masses?

“Do not look after yourself, Yudhisthir,
look at the entire world.
See men like you, craving restlessly
for peace and happiness.

“Suppose you find your own
cherished joy in the forests,
tell me, what footprints will you
leave in this world?

“If you escape from the grip of sorrow
 reaching some desolate place,
 where can this vast burning world
 find some shelter?

“If all men and women accept
 your ideal, can
 the entire displaced creation
 go and live in the forest?

“The inhabited land will turn
 into a burial ground,
 the palaces will be empty.
 As feared by the sage, his forest
 will become a township.

“If citizens begin to burn
 in the triple heat,
 with their *kamandal*-s³⁷ saints will run away
 from the jungle.

“Yudhisthir! Does a sage run away
 from his house or the forest?
 From life he always runs away,
 then here, then there.

“He only wants sweet juice,
 not a bitter or salty drink.
 He only wants to acquire,
 not to give up.

“He finds joy in conquest
 and grief in defeat.
 He smiles in progress
 and laments with decay.

³⁷ A *kamandal* is a wooden or earthen pot used by ascetics.

“How can he be indifferent? He grumbles
 weeps and is restless -
 'Why is life not moulded
 by my wishes?'

“Life is displayed in a
 beautiful frame.
 How can it be moulded
 to everyone's wish?

“Life is a jungle, clearing the bushes
 everyone can make his own path.
 Life is not anyone's slave,
 bought and owned as desired.

“Life is not for those, Yudhisthir,
 who are frightened by it.
 Life is for those, who can fight without fear,
 standing firm on their feet.

“The ocean makes everyone's mouth
 turn away from its salty waters.
 It gives nectar to those who churn it
 with the Mandar mountain³⁸.

“A sage wants to pick the nectareous fruits
 without climbing into the branches.
 He wants to drink sweet juice without
 lifting the Mandar mountain.

“He turns away from the ocean of life
 saying that it is bitter.
 He turns his back on the treasure
 of wine and nectar, gems and diamonds.

³⁸ The mountain which was used by the gods as a churning stick, at the churning of the sea of milk.

“He runs away from life
 convinced that
 a perennial treasure of joy
 is hidden in the forest.

“When he finds the treasure
 he has found everything.
 Leaving his home and finding his body
 how could he ever come back?

“Yudhisthir! Running to the forest
 vexed with the crowded world
 is a terrible defeat for a man
 in the battle of life.

“This retirement is pitiful,
 a contemptible escape.
 That heaven is an illusion
 of a strained and defeated mind.

“Such a mind seeks salvation from noise
 with closed ears,
 escape from fire
 with fleeing strides.

“It carefully protects
 storm-fearing meditation.
 It hides in the shade, afraid
 of the sunlight of life.

“Far away from the world of action,
 escaping to its own pavillion
 it dreams of the unattainable
 in hollow imagination.

“A dream unmarked
 by any finger.
 a dream in which there is no
 fire of life.

“A sphere of dreams, where only
 flowers and flowers blossom,
 where no dust arises,
 no thorns are found on the path.

“Where hardness does not reign
 only tenderness,
 where moulted iron turns into
 a cluster of rays around the moon.

“Where the stream of life obeys
 the commands of imagination,
 only what is dear to the mind
 can happen there.

“Ask the detached saint,
 where on earth
 such a dream-world of his mind
 can exist.

“Where is that street,
 adorned only with flowers?
 Where is that path, where
 thorns do not prick your feet?

“Where is that garden, which is always
 green and filled with blooming flowers?
 Where is that part of the sky
 where no dust of work can be found?

“Turning his back on the battle he ran
 and took shelter in the realm of thought.
 Can burning sorrows thus
 flee from the world?

How can he escape
 from his own duty?
 Should he fill his stomach
 by begging if not by earning?

“The whole earth is a field of action,
 as long as the body of man exists.
 Duty will prevail
 in every atom of life.

“How can a man find happiness
 if he leaves his right of action?
 Action will follow him,
 wherever he goes.

“Yudhisthir! Renunciation is not
 the path of a brave man.
 Where a man walks is the earth,
 and not the sky.

“What you accept today
 with your humiliated mind,
 is a deposit of action,
 taking you far away from life.

“Blowing out a lamp gives no
 credit to life.
 Righteousness is to keep it burning,
 to remove the darkness of the world.

“Detachment leading you to illusion
 is unhealthy and powerless,
 the shadow of non-action,
 the deceit of hollow knowledge.

“Save yourself Yudhisthir! It may
 drown you in this thought.
 Let the deadly smoke of non-action
 not spread over your life.

“Retirement of an inactive mind
 is a fleeting wave.
 Once it starts, it cannot
 return home.

“It makes life distasteful
 saying that it is not immortal:
 'Sleep is awakening,
 stagnant death is life.'

“It says: 'Non-existence is existence,
 loss is gain.
 Being lost in non-action
 is the best action.'

“'The invisible and unattainable
 alone are the truth.
 Sheer illusion is the visible
 where deeds are done with ease'.

“It fosters non-action
 by the power of its moaning.
 It fells the tree of life
 with the deceit of detachment.

“Unable to tolerate the tumult
of a work-obsessed world,
detachment extinguishes the fire
of man in numerous ways.

“With a kiss it wipes out
the mirth and smiles of flowers
and smothers the vibrations of progress
with a flake of snow.

“No vigorous songs resound
in the heart of its bird,
its flute does not play
an inspired tune.

“It says to plants: 'Do not grow -
growth itself is sorrow.
Self-destruction is the great salvation,
fading away the only joy'.

“It shows fear of death to the charming
and blooming flowers.
Saying it will be the prey of death,
it interrupts its happiness.

“This retirement will deprive man
of wealth and beauty, of brilliance and joy.
It will make man weak,
meek and humble.

“It not only steals the zeal
from the soul of man,
it also snatches valour from his arms,
power from his arrows.

“Yudhisthir! Who does not know
 that this world is transitory?
 Which man being born has not followed
 the law of death?

“Every man radiates
 transience at all times.
 Nothing but mortality
 is seen by his eyes.

“How can that perplexed foolish man
 do his work so withdrawn?
 How can he be ready to fight
 the battle of the world?

“Rejecting the present
 turmoil of life,
 he contemplates monstrous death
 day and night.

“How and when can that inactive man
 be ever of use to others?
 How can he make any flowers
 blossom on earth?

“He thinks:
 'The entire earth is mortal,
 this hard labour is an illusion,
 how can a flower be immortal?'

“Leaving the world, he roams about
 in search of his immortality.
 Invincible mortality can swallow him
 at any time.

“But the course of the world
 will go on unabated,
 one flame goes on burning
 taking the burden of others.

“Faded flowers and petals fall
 and new flowers bloom.
 Some travellers stop and again
 some new ones join the throng.

“An idle person never becomes
 a scholar or immortal by weeping,
 while nobody's age decreases
 by the burden of the work.

“Yudhisthir! This is the difference
 between these two:
 One smiles on the earth, the other
 weeps, gazing up at the sky.

“One decorates a bit of ground
 with blossoming lotuses,
 he fills the earth with abundance and beauty
 by the power of his hands.

“He endures the dirt of the earth
 and suffers the threefold heat.
 Now he plays with the light,
 then he flourishes in the dark.

“He makes the milk-streams of the earth flow,
 breaking the impenetrable soil.
 He drinks the earth's juices and beats
 the drums of the victory of man.

“He leaves the world
 making it more beautiful,
 advancing it further than
 when he had joined it.

“The other relies on
 inactive thought,
 without a boat in the ocean,
 searching for the shore in vain.

“Feeding his body on alms
 given by toiling men,
 he says: 'Only I am detached,
 the entire world is mean.'

“He roams about saying: 'Everything is deceit,
 wherever you can see.
 Only that is really true which
 cannot be seen, cannot be reached.'

“As if this body and this place of action
 are an illusion,
 as if the virtue and the valour of man
 are truly false.

“As if man can be reformed
 by abandoning work,
 as if he can stay in the sky
 leaving the earth behind.

“As if man becomes dirty
 by taking his birth,
 by reducing the burden of grief
 with his toiling hands.

As if the sensations of form, taste and smell,
 sound and touch are really sinful,
 as if all man's senses
 are enemies and not his friends.

“As if the path of salvation is revealed
 by killing the soul,
 as if real life is not easy
 through life on this earth.

“As if the entire creation
 is a sudden incident,
 as if there is no aim linked
 to the birth of man.

“Yudhisthir! What is our sin
 if the earth is mortal?
 No man has come here on his own -
 he has been sent.

“If the fortune of man is not here
 on this mortal earth,
 he should have been born
 as a creature of the skies!

“With the form of rays, without desires,
 without the ailments of hunger and thirst,
 liberated from the bond of work,
 without hands or legs, eyes or ears.

“But, the soil is hard
 and man feels hunger,
 he feels thirsty in his body
 and in his mind.

“This thirst, this hunger at all times
never allows man to sleep.
It inspires the mind to think
and the hands to work.

“That heaven of the mind is false,
which the body cannot reach.
No thing is better than that,
which can be created by your hands.

“Whatever the hands may bring,
the mind too can get.
Mere meditation is beyond the reach,
of not only the hands, but also the mind.

“Successful are the hands which can also
fill the mind with waves of joy.
That meditation is fruitful which gives
what is inaccessible to the hands.

“Where the path of the hands is different
from that of thought,
the shape of that life is not clear,
caught in a conflict.

“This conflict cannot die
by mere intellectual retirement.
The thirst of the mind cannot be lessened
by abandoning the world.

“This enemy is not from outside,
which man can avoid by hiding in the woods.
Wherever you go you find this foe,
well seated in your mind.

“The foe which the sage defeats
abandoning the world,
Yudhisthir, you can defeat
by staying in the world.

“Whatever the saint kills
killing his soul,
you can control
by living with discipline.

“Being in the world, you can
find even that joy,
which sages and saints
can never attain.

“The joy you receive if you belong
to innumerable fellow-men,
if you share the smiles of others
and weep with them in their distress.

The joy you have when extending
your hands towards the lame,
when you bear on your shoulders
the burden of a weak and poor man.

“The forest is not the only righteous land,
look, how big the earth is.
Misery is begging for help
at every step.

“It needs food, clothes and water,
it needs hope,
it needs strong hands and feet,
it needs kind words.

“It needs that sight
 which you have already seen,
 it needs that destination,
 where you have stopped.

“Yudhisthir! The fear driving you
 to abandon life,
 can show you the entire world
 in flames.

“If retirement is a search for life,
 do not hide your method.
 Everyone is impatient, teach
 the magical hymns to one and all.

“Go and put out the fire of the passions
 of man by your meditation.
 Shower nectar,
 drench the burning earth.

“Seizing the throne
 do not give it to an empty forest.
 Yudhisthir! Recognise your duty,
 make your mind strong and hard.

“Every limb of mother Bhārat
 is wounded by arrows.
 Piteous cries for help rise
 from innumerable hearts.

“There is tumult and much fear,
 there is great danger today.
 In agony men and women are coming out
 from the cave of death.

“Leaving them behind, what peace
 can you get in the forest?
 How can you embrace flowers and plants
 abandoning the service of human beings?

“Wipe away your tears, get up and go -
 go to society, not to the woods.
 Stand up, hope of the life
 of innumerable men.

“Desireless action calls you,
 the *Gītā* calls you,
 a war-fearing distressed earth
 is waiting for you.

“Give nectar to this earth,
 all beaten and wounded.
 Bring back colour and blossom
 to numerous flowers.

“Wipe away the tears of all
 who lost their kinsmen.
 Return the smiles to countless
 agonised lips.

“There is no power of life
 with the dead, Yudhisthir.
 Only the living bear
 the burden of the world.

“When Duryodhan died, the royal duty
 fell on you,
 who else but you can bear
 this burden?

“Bear the burden of the earth
as a diligent saint.
You can get nothing
as a migrant of the skies.

“There is only emptiness above,
there is nothing in the sky.
Yudhisthir! Whatever there is,
is in the earth, in life.

“Acquire that in the right way
and you will have all.
Even the sky comes to
the conqueror of the earth.

“Enjoy the earth in such a way
that it leaves no stain on you.
Let the earth merge in you,
not you in the earth.

“Teach this method of
enjoyment to all.
Let their bodies merge with their minds,
not their minds with their bodies.

“The day the mind rules
the body of man,
renunciation will control life,
drowned in enjoyment.

“The day man knows gold is a means
and not an end,
he will recognize
the real form of man.

“The day man's vision is not blocked
 by thrones and regalia,
 the day he sees the hidden man
 beyond these splendours,

“The day man can see
 by the power of his knowledge,
 he will be in his inner self
 and beyond the reach of the body,

“That day the fortune of man
 can dawn on his life,
 that day the conch will sound
 the great victory of man.

“Yudhisthir! The land of your destination
 is far, do not delay,
 Push human society
 forward on this path.

“Yes, man is a great sinner,
 he kills other men,
 but, do not forget, only man
 can die for the sake of man.

“Greed, malice, revenge and enmity
 are the obstacles of humanity.
 The support of meditation, sacrifice
 and renunciation is unlimited.

“Inspire other people with the strength
 of your character.
 Shed rays of virtue on them
 by your pure meditation.

“Do not think all day all night
that man is engrossed in sin.
He is the only one, who weeps
and repents after sin.

“The hope of this lamentation,
of these tears is great.
It proclaims that humankind
has not perished yet.

“Not real is the burning of man
in the fire of sin.
He keeps going forward,
gathering new strength.

“The world is no support for the
splendour of a virtuous man.
A ray caught in darkness
is the hope of this earth.

“The pearls of tears on the petals of flowers,
the hope in these tears,
are the short and precise definition
of the life of this clay.

“Yudhisthir! Go ahead lighting the lamp of hope,
one day, the earth will be freed from the fear of war.
The thought of man will not be engulfed in passion,
life will not be served by injustice.
The greatness of man will not be reduced by his defeat,
the brilliance of man will not grow with his victory.
Love and sacrifice will be the only measure of humankind,
the earth will turn into a paradise with the love of man.