

CHAPTER 1: PART 1; ***ARJUNA'S DESPONDENCY***

In the previous classes on *Kathopanishad*, we discussed a mantra; '*yathāvad anuśāsanam.*' This indicates the final state a person reaches through the *sāstras*. '*Yadā sarve pramichanti, kāma yasya hṛdasyatāḥ.*' When all desires in a person heart are destroyed, '*ataḥ mārtyo amṛto bhavati,*' then man becomes Immortal. '*Yathāvad anuśāsanam.*'

Śaṅkara commented on this mantra. He said that *Ajñāna*, spiritual Ignorance, is what directly obstructs *Ātma Bodha*, awareness of the Self. In the explanation, he says that in truth, there is nothing that can obstruct the light of the Self. This is because it is Perfect and Self-luminous. Therefore, there is nothing that is powerful enough to obstruct That.

To be able to obstruct, there must be something with equal power. However, there is no such thing. Then where do all of these obstacles come? It is in the path of *sādhana*. All of these are obstacles in the progression of *sādhana*. There is nothing that can obstruct *Jñāna*. If there was something with the strength to obstruct *Jñāna*, then *Jñāna* might be unable to overcome that and shine. However, this *Jñāna* is luminous. It is energy itself. That is Perfection itself. Therefore, nothing else has the capacity to obstruct that. All of these obstacles and difficulties affect one's progress.

That is what *Jñāna* is described as '*Niratiśayam.*' This means nothing can oppose it. Difficulties come to an object that can be opposed, and will affect the object. However, this *Jñāna* is *niratiśayam*, something that nothing can oppose. Therefore, there is nothing strong

enough to obstruct *Jñāna*, to bring any shortcoming to *Jñāna*, or to make *Jñāna* increase or diminish.

Therefore, each and every difficulty is in relation to the progression of the *jīva's sādhana*. These are called obstacles. In that level, there are many obstacles. There is *kāma*, desire, and other emotions. That is what we previously discussed.

Now we are discussing the Bhagavad Gītā. This means, '*bhagavatā gītāṁ*' – that which was sung by the Lord. The word '*gītā*' is in the feminine gender, and means 'that which is sung.' The reason for this is because the *Gītā* is considered as an *Upaniṣad*. The word '*upaniṣad*' is a feminine word.

Here, the word '*gītā*,' means that the Lord instructed this. This doesn't mean that the Lord sang. (laughs) This is a conversation between the Lord and Arjuna. It is Lord *Vyāsa* who made that into melody, and gave this name. This means, 'the song I have created is the Lord's instruction.' Thus, the name '*Gītā*' is given to mean, 'instruction.'

In the end of each chapter, it is chanted, '*iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsu upaniṣadsu brahavidyāyām yogaśāstre.*' In this, the Gita is called an *Upaniṣad*. In truth, the Gita is not an *Upaniṣad*. The *Upaniṣads* are a part of the Vedas, and the *Gītā* is not in the Vedas. Therefore, it is not considered as *śruti*. The *Prasthāna Trayam*, the three most important works of *Śaṅkara's* commentaries, are the *Gītā*, the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Brahma Sutras*. Within that, the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Gītā* aren't a part of the Vedas. They aren't *Upaniṣads*.

Even though they aren't *Upaniṣads*, *āchāryas* have given these two a position equal to the *Upaniṣads*. In truth, the *Gītā* is a *Smṛti*. This is because it comes as a part of an *itihāsa*, the *Mahābhārata*. In the traditional way, only the Vedas are considered '*śruti*.' The *Purāṇas*,

Itihāsas, and so forth, are all included in the *Smṛtis*. Therefore, the *Gītā* is a part of the *Smṛtis*.

The *Smṛtis* are also further divided, into *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsas*, *Dharma Mimamsa*, etc. However, normally everything is just call as ‘*Smṛti*.’ In several parts of *Śaṅkara*’s commentary of the *Gītā*, it says, ‘*iti Gītā smṛteḥ*’ – ‘this is said in the *Gītā Smṛti*.’ Thus, the *Gītā* is considered as a *Smṛti*.

However, in the meditation verses on the *Gītā*, it says, ‘*sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhamḥ gopālanandanaḥ, Pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīrbhoktā dugdhamḥ gitāmṛtaḥ mahat.*’ Having all of the *Upaniṣads* as cows, and as Arjuna the calf, the Lord milked the cows, which produced the ‘*Gītāmṛtaḥ*’ – the nectar of the Gita, the *mokṣa śāstra*. This is said in the *Gītā Dhyānam*.

This means that the *Gītā* contains the essence of the *Upaniṣads*. In the *Kathopaniṣad*, we studied, ‘*ūrdhvamūlaḥ avak śak*’ – ‘with its root above and branches below.’ Several mantras like this are seen in the same way in the *Gītā*. These are without much difference. In *Kathopaniṣad*, it is said, ‘*na jāyate mriyate vā pibaśchit*’ – ‘the Self is never born nor ever dies.’ Many of these mantras in the *Kathopaniṣad* are seen also in the *Gītā*. Therefore, because this contains the essence of the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* is considered as equal to an *Upaniṣad*. That is why *āchāryas* consider the *Gītā* as an *Upaniṣad*. ‘*Śrīmad bhagavad gītāsu upaniṣadsu.*’

When we discuss the *Gītā*, particularly the first chapter, the background of the *Gītā* should be understood. This is the background in relation to the *Mahābhārata*. Only if you correctly understand the background of the *Gītā* in the *Mahābhārata* will you understand this first chapter.

A person should study the sections of the *Mahābhārata* before the Bhagavad Gītā. These should be read. Only then will one grasp the beginning of the Gītā. There has been a mistake even among some *paṇḍits*. This is because they comment on the Gītā without understanding its background in the *Mahābhārata*. This is the section starting with, '*dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre*. The first chapter is especially connected to the previous sections in the *Mahābhārata*.

The epic of the *Mahābhārata* isn't so relevant in the second chapter. That is primarily concerned with spiritual philosophy. However, the first chapter isn't like that. This describes the background of the war. There, *Sañjaya* is describing several things about the war to the king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.

There are primarily two views about the Gītā. One is a purely philosophical view. This is a view of the principle of the Gītā. In that case, the person instructing in the war ground, the listener, etc., all become mere principles. In other words, this doesn't consider the background of the epic. There are some who comment like that.

In that view, the 'war ground' is our own mind. In the *Kathopaniṣad*, we studied the symbolism of the chariot. There it says that the senses are the horses, the mind seated within, and the body the chariot. The objects are the paths that the horses follow, and the intelligence is seated within as the Lord of the chariot. Thus, the instructions of the Gītā may be explained by using this symbolism. These two things will be connected together.

Some people comment on the Gītā with the view that there is nothing connected to the *Mahābhārata*. This is that the description of the Gītā's background is purely a principle, without any relation to an epic or history. Then the symbolism of the chariot in the *Kathopaniṣad*

is taken in the midst of an epic, and told through characters. Their attitude is, 'It's enough if you understand this principle.'

There are some who comment like that. However, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Gītā* are a historical event. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* was an Incarnation of God who lived on the Earth. The *Mahābhārata* War took place in the *Kurukṣetra*. In that circumstance, the Lord instructed Arjuna.' There is another style of commenting that accepts and believes this.

This group accepts the background within the *Mahābhārata* as part of history. This is another way of commentary. When that happens, we will have to understand the explanation of the background within the *Mahābhārata*.

Among all commentaries, *Śrī Shaṅkarāchārya's bhāṣyā* is the most dated commentary available to us today. This is a commentary in Sanskrit. After that, there is the commentary of *Rāmanujāchārya*, and of *Madhvāchārya*. These are commentaries that are still published today. These are also two important commentaries. Then there is the commentary of *Vallabhāchārya*, as well as the commentary by *Srīdharāchārya*. He also commentated on the *Bhagavatam*.

Then there is the commentary by *Abhinavaguptan*. That is very well-known. Then among modern *āchāryas*, there is the commentary by *Madhusūdana Sarasvati*. All of these are well-known Sanskrit commentaries. Then there are the explanations of all of these commentaries. These are called '*Tikas*.' These are also published today. All of these are only in Sanskrit. Then there is also the commentary by *Nilakanthāchārya*. He commentated on the entire *Mahābhārata*.

All of these commentaries accept the background of the *Gītā* in the *Mahābhārata* epic. Among those, only the commentary by *Abhinavaguptan* doesn't consider that part and only explains according

to spiritual principles. That can be purchased even today. It is a very abridged commentary.

Like we said, this background can be interpreted as being within each individual. There is the one who gives instruction, and the listener. Both of these are within. The body is the chariot. This is the same as in the *Kathopanishad*. That is how *Abhinavaguptan* commentates.

Then there are others who explain the Gītā connected to Yoga. There are some who commentate on the Gītā, only related to *Yoga śāstra*. Thus, there are several kinds of commentaries. Among all of these people, they all accept that the Lord instructed this as a historic event. However, some modern commentators don't accept that. They only commentate in a philosophical manner.

Here, *Śaṅkarāchārya* will say in the Preface itself, 'the Lord incarnated as the son of *Devaki*. He instructed Arjuna on the *Kurukṣetra* battleground.' *Śaṅkara* explains this as being the truth, as a historical event.

There is another specialty about the Gītā. There are several traditions (*saṁpradāyas*) in India, such as Dualism, Non-dualism, Qualified Dualism, etc. Even in Non-dualism, *Advaita*, there are many divisions. Even though these are few in Kerala, there are numerous Sanyassa traditions in North India, numerous Guru-disciple lineages, and many different āśrams.

Abhinavaguptan was purely of the *śaiva sampradāya*. He spread the philosophy of *Shaiva-advaita*. This is called '*Kaṣmir Shaivism*.' Whether it is *Shaivites*, or *Vaiśnavas*, or any spiritual tradition, in traditions of sanyassis and of *gr̥hasthas*, the Gītā is a book that is used for daily study.

No matter what tradition of Sanyassa it is, one must recite at least one chapter from the Gītā as a discipline. This belief has spread to all corners of India. In all *āśrams*, sanyassis are required to recite at least one chapter of the Gītā as a group, together. This is for all sanyassis, no matter what saṁpradāya. They keep a small copy of the Gītā in their pocket in all times. This is meant for daily recitation.

There is not another scripture, whether the *Rāmāyana*, etc., that is as accepted everywhere, by all sanyassa traditions. There are some strong philosophical differences between different spiritual traditions. However, they all accept the Gītā. That is the greatness of the Gītā. It is a greatness that contains all philosophies, all branches of spirituality. That is a specialty of the Gita. That is why there are so many commentaries written.

There is not a single spiritual scripture with this many commentaries. There are not as many commentaries for either the *Upaniṣads* or the *Brahma Sutras*. Thus, we can understand that all philosophies and all views are within the Gītā. The Gītā contains all of these. Therefore, a person can select from the Gītā the path that he has the most inclination and taste towards.

Śaṅkarāchārya's commentary of the Gītā is very strictly in *Advaita*. It says there that *Jñāna* is the cause for *Mokṣa*. Non-duality is the truth. The world is illusory.' *Śaṅkarāchārya* supports all of his philosophies through the Gītā. One of these is that *Jñāna* and *karma* cannot be combined in the same person. Also, he says '*karma* isn't a means to *Mokṣa*.' These ideas are supported through the Gītā.

However, there are commentaries that are exactly opposite of this. 'The world is real. Duality is real.' Some have commentated on the Gita in a way that is favorable to these ideas. In this way, there have been countless commentaries on the Gītā, with different explanations.

A person can express that many ideas from the Gītā. That is how great and vast the ideas of the Gītā are.’ We can understand this.

The most famous commentary of the Gītā in the *Advaita* philosophy is the commentary by *Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya*. Like that, there is another famous commentary on the Gītā according to Advaita, by *Madhusūdana Sarasvati*. This is called, ‘*Gūḍhārtha Dīpikā*.’ There is also the commentary by *Shaṅkārānandi*, in the *Advaita* philosophy. The commentary by *Nilakaṇṭha*, ‘*Nilakaṇṭhī*,’ is also according to *Advaita*.

There is an ancient commentary by *Hanumat Achārya*, called, *Vaiśachaki bhāṣyā*. This is also according to *Advaita*. Like that, there is another ancient commentary of the Gītā, by *Vidyādirāja Paṇḍit*. These are all books that can be gotten today. Then there are so many commentaries that we cannot even know about.

These are all commentaries according to *Advaita*. It’s not possible finish reading these in a single human birth. Nowadays, there are books of the Gītā with 7 Sanskrit commentaries included. In North India, there are books of the Gītā with 14 Sanskrit commentaries. It’s not possible to finish reading these in a human lifespan. It’s only that when there are sections that require more explanation that these other commentaries may help. That’s all. Otherwise, it’s not possible to completely read all of these.

For the bhāṣyās by *Rāmanujāchārya* and *Madhusūdana Sarasvati*, there are very vast explanations written in Sanskrit, called *Tīkas*. It’s not possible to fully read all of those. However, one thing we can understand from all of this is that the Gītā contains such a vast universe of ideas.

Then there are so many commentaries written in modern times. There are so many. I’m just saying this to indicate the vastness of the

Gītā. The Gītā isn't a scripture that we should approach lightly and insignificantly. This is only said to understand how vast and deep the Gītā is.

We normally chant a meditation verse before beginning the Gītā. It's not known who wrote this. This has spread everywhere, and is full of meaning. Like that, the greatness of the Gītā is extolled in the *Purāṇas*. These parts describe the benefits from reading the Gītā. These were all written afterwards.

One specialty of the Gītā is that a name is given to each chapter, such as '*Sāṁkhya Yoga*,' '*Karma Yoga*,' etc. These chapter names have also come after the composition of the Gītā, and not included by *Vyāsa*. The ancient commentators of the Gītā never accepted these additions. The second and third chapters are called, '*Sāṁkhya Yoga*,' and '*Karma Yoga*.' The primary three commentators never accepted these names. Therefore, there is a question as to who changed the Gītā and added these names.

The names are meaningful. It's not that they have shortcomings, but they aren't the creation of Lord *Vyāsa*. The reason for saying this is because these olden commentators never gave those names to the chapters. Where *Śaṅkarāchārya* gives names to the chapters, they are mainly different names from these.

These names aren't meaningless. They are meaningful, but the opinion of most is that they weren't the creation of *Vyāsa*. When *Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* commentates on the Gītā, it is divided into three *kandas*. The first 6 chapters are called '*Karma Kanda*.' the next 6 are called, '*Upāsana Kanda*.' The last 6 are called '*Jñāna Kanda*.'

The reason to divide like that is because the *Vedas* are like that. In the *Vedas*, there are three *kandas*; '*Karma*, '*Upāsana*, and '*Jñāna*.' There is the *Karma Kanda* in the *Vedas*. Then there is the *Upāsana*

Kanda, where different forms of Vedic worship are described. Then there is the *Jñāna Kanda*, or the *Upaniṣads*. This section gives importance to spiritual knowledge.

In this way, the *Vedas* are composed of three *kandas*. The *Gītā* is the essence of the *Vedas*. Therefore, there are also three *Kandas* in the *Gītā*. That is why *Madhusūdana Sarasvati* separated each six chapters. When this is explained in the *Advaita* Philosophy, these three sections can be called, ‘*tat,*’ ‘*tvam,*’ and ‘*asi.*’ That is how *Madhusūdana Sarasvati* comments. In that itself, there is *Jñāna*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti*. That commentary gives importance to *bhakti*. The first *Kanda* explains *bhakti* mixed with *karma*. The second *Kanda* describes Pure *Bhakti*. The final *Kanda* explains *Bhakti* mixed with *Jñāna*.

In this way, *Madhusūdhana Sarasvati* gives importance to *bhakti*, though he is an *Advaiti*. Though he was an *Advaiti*, he was a bhakta. ‘*Vaṁśī vibhuṣita dharā navanīla..*’ He wrote that śloka. ‘*Kṛṣṇāt paraṁ tattvaṁ ahaṁ na jānāmi.*’ He wrote this. He wrote several works such as ‘*Bhakti rasāyanam.*’

At the same time, he wrote several vast works in *Advaita*, such as ‘*Advaita Siddhi.*’ His commentary of the *Gītā* is likewise noteworthy. In that commentary, he divides the *Gītā* into three *kandas*, explained as the three words, ‘*tat tvam asi.*’ However, these *kandas* are explained as ‘*karma and bhakti,*’ ‘*pure bhakti,*’ and ‘*bhakti and jñāna.*’ In this way, he has given more importance to *bhakti*. *Madhusūdhana Sarasvati’s* commentary is very philosophical. In some important sections, we can discuss that.

Now, we are primarily discussing the *Śaṅkara Bhāṣyā*. This is because the *Śaṅkara Bhāṣyā* has been most widely accepted among the ancient commentaries on the *Gītā*. Here, we are on the first chapter. *Śaṅkara* hasn’t written any commentary for this chapter. This is

because Śaṅkara wrote his bhāṣyā on the ‘Gītā.’ We said before, this means ‘the Lord’s instructions.’ That is what Śaṅkara comments on. The Lord’s instructions start from the 11th śloka of the 2nd chapter; ‘Aśochyān anvaśochas tvam prajñāvādāmś cha bhāṣase.’ From this part onwards, Śaṅkara has composed a bhāṣyā.

This first chapter is included in order to understand the background behind the Gītā. In truth, this isn’t part of the Gītā. The Gītā is an instruction. Here, there is no instruction, so Śaṅkara hasn’t written any commentary. However, many other commentators, such as *Madhusūdhana Sarasvati* and *Anandagiri* have written commentaries on the first chapter. This is all for clearly understanding the background in the *Mahābhārata*.

Actually, in the *Mahābhārata*, there is a *Bhagavad Gītā Parvam*. This is part of *Bhīṣma Parva*. In that *Bhagavad Gītā Parvam*, there are several chapters like the first chapter here, before this. All of these are the background of the Gītā. This conversation is a continuation of these, and leads to the first śloka, ‘*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre.*’

In the section before this, the *Mahābhārata* war had already begun. 10 days of battle had finished. On the 10th day, grandsire *Bhīṣma* fell. He didn’t die. He was lying on the ground. To inform king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* of this circumstance, the fall of grandsire *Bhīṣma*, *Saṅjaya* goes to the palace. In the palace, *Saṅjaya* informs the blind king of these details. This is in the chapters before this, in the *Bhagavad Gītā Parvam*.

Saṅjaya told the king that grandsire *Bhīṣma* had fallen. Then there is the lament of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. He says, ‘all of this happened because of my fault. This is because of my bad advice, of inviting the long-life celibate *Bhīṣma* to battle.’ Here, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* admits to all of his own faults. Then he blames the *Paṇḍavas*. He also blames his son

Dūryodhana. After all of this, he says, ‘definitely the *Paṇḍavas* will win the war.’

After saying all of these things as a soliloquy to *Saṅjaya*, he asks about the war. ‘How did this war begin?’ He asks several times, ‘Who is on the side of the *Paṇḍavas*? ‘Who is on the side of the *Kauravas*? How is their battle formation? Who is in front, and in behind?’ He asks each matter to *Saṅjaya*, and *Saṅjaya* gives the answer to each one.

Because *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was blind, he couldn’t know about these details directly. Therefore, *Saṅjaya* says, ‘I can tell all the details about the war.’ In the war, several parts take place in the *Kurukṣetra*. A single person wouldn’t be able to see the entire war; that’s how vast it was. *Saṅjaya* says, ‘this encounter of both sides cannot be seen entirely by a human being. However, I can see all of that. Whatever is taking place on the battlefield, I can know it. That’s not all. I can know how the war will change and end in this moment itself. I can know about the beginning and end of this war. I can know from the view of the battlefield, or from the sky.’

There are several things in the war that an ordinary person cannot see. For example, there is the course of the souls of those who die in battle. ‘Where do these souls go? ‘I can know about such matters.’ Why is all of this? It is because of the Grace of Lord *Vyāsa*. That is how I have gotten this.’ I can know every detail about the war, but that’s not all. Wherever I travel on the battlefield, no weapon can affect my body. When someone goes to the war ground, they will be killed by weapons, but those cannot touch me.’

‘I have obtained all of these boons from Lord *Vyāsa*. Therefore, I will tell you truly about all details of the war.’ This is what *Saṅjaya* says. After this, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* again asks, ‘who led the army on the first 10 days? What is the formation of our side? Who is the leader of the

army?’ In this way, *Saṅjaya* gives explanations to each of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*’s questions.

After this, comes this first chapter of the *Gītā*, starting with ‘*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre.*’ Thus, this chapter comes after several explanations about the war. To understand this, we will have to read directly from the *Mahābhārata*. Here, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is asking again. Even after *Saṅjaya* explained about the war several times in different ways, not being satisfied, he again asks.

This is a question that was previously asked. This isn’t asked for the first time.

***Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ
Māmakaṁ paṇḍavāśchaiva kiṁ akurvata saṅjaya. 1.1.***

1.1 What did the sons of Pandu and my people do when, desirous to fight, they assembled together on the field of Kurukṣetra, O Sanjaya?’

This chapter has been given the name, ‘*Viśāda Yoga.*’ This describes the despondency of Arjuna, and the beginning of the Lord removing that despondency. Here it asks, ‘*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre.*’ It says that the battlefield is the field of *Dharma*. This comes in the *Mahābhārata* in several occasions. This is also commentated by many *āchāryas*.

‘*Kurukṣetra*’ is the name of the place. The quality of that place is given as ‘*dharmakṣetram.*’ This is because this *Kurukṣetram* isn’t for war, but a place used for performing sacrifices. In a sacrifice (*yāga*) the performers accumulate great merit. Charity and other good acts take place there. Therefore, this is a place where righteous actions such as charity have taken place.

In truth, this war is a type of *yāga*. In the *Mahābhārata*, this war is described as a sacrifice. It is a huge *yāga* happening. There is the offerer, the offering, the priest, etc. There, this killing of men is the offering of ghee in a sacrifice. The war is the sacrificial fire. Like this, *Vyāsa* describes the war as a *yāga*, in poetic language. Thus, even the war taking place in *Kurukṣetra* is a sacrifice.

Otherwise, this is a place where hundreds of sacrifices have been performed. Therefore, this *Kurukṣetra* is a *Dharma kṣetra*, a field of righteousness. It is a holy place. This is said in other sections of the *Mahābhārata*, in the part of deciding the place for battle. This was decided as a suitable place for battle, because this war itself is a *dharma*; the *dharma* of the *kṣatriya*. This isn't just mere fighting. War is the *dharma* of the *kṣatriya*. Therefore, this is a suitable place for performing dharmic actions. That is why the *Kurukṣetra* is called '*Dharmakṣetra*.'

In that *Kurukṣetra*, the field of *Dharma*, '*samavetaḥ*' – conjoining together, '*yuyutsavaḥ*,' desirous to fight, who are they? '*Māmakaḥ*,' my people, '*Pāṇḍavāḥ*,' and the sons of *Paṇḍa*, '*cha eva*' – there are my people and the *Pāṇḍavas*. '*Sañjaya kim akurvataḥ*' – *Sañjaya*, what did they do? When *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* asks, 'what did those desirous to fight do?,' there is something we should understand.

Sañjaya has already given the details about the war. The war has begun. 10 days have passed, and grandsire *Bhīṣma* has fallen. *Sañjaya* says that when grandsire *Bhīṣma* fell, the war was finished. 'Now, everyone else won't last more than a day or two.' After this much was said, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is asking, 'what did those who came to fight do?'

What is the meaning of this question? This is to know, 'in what way did this war take place? What happened in the war?' When a war begins, in what ways does it begin? To know the specifics about that,

Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks, ‘what did they do?’ In other words, ‘how were the formations of the armies? How were the leaders?’

The answer given is according to that. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* asked this question several times before this, in the *Bhagavad Gītā Parva*, in the *Mahābhārata*. ‘What did they do there? How did they act?’ This is because *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* must know every part of the explanation.

In the previous sections, he asked, ‘how did *Bhīṣma* fall? How did this happen to *Bhīṣma*? What position did *Bhīṣma* hold in the war? Who was *Bhīṣma* before? Who is he after? Who is surrounding *Bhīṣma*?’ In this way, the king asks about each and every matter. Like this, the king asks, ‘*kiṁ akurvata?*’ ‘What did they do?’

There are numerous people who have commented on this first śloka without understanding the background of the *Mahābhārata*, without even casting a look in the *Mahābhārata*. They comment according to their imagination. They say it as, ‘two people are seeing the very beginning of a war, and are afraid.’

That has no relevance. This is because it is a question that comes after the king has known that the war is taking place, and that *Bhīṣma* has fallen. ‘Did they retreat from the war?’ There are many commentaries like this. Several of these are in *Malayalam*.

The reason is this; they try to teach others without learning or understanding in the correct way. There is no problem with speeches. Those words will dissolve into the air. However, these people have written books. These people have no knowledge, and write with authority. They decide, ‘people should understand, just how much ignorance I have on this subject.’ (laughs)

Many have explained this śloka like this. I’ve read these commentaries before, and believed that this conversation takes place before the war. I thought this for a long time. I understood when I

looked and read in the Mahābhārata. This isn't before the war. This is in the middle of the war. That is where this conversation takes place.

That is also after discussing many other things about the war. This is after many chapters in the *Bhagavad Gītā Parvam*, in *Bhīṣma Parva*, in the *Mahābhārata*. I don't remember how many chapters are before this. However, this question is after several chapters of conversation about the details of the war. He asks again.

We will ask something several times to know about something that is very important. 'How is that? How is it? How did it happen?' This is because of our interest. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* says himself before this. '*Bhīṣma* is one whom the *devas* requested to fight for them. *Bhīṣma* was even able to defeat the warrior *Paraśurāma*. The *devas* had prayed for *Bhīṣma's* aid in defeating the *asuras*. Nobody was ever able to defeat *Bhīṣma* in battle. That same *Bhīṣma* has fallen on the battlefield. He didn't die. How did such a war happen? The *Paṇḍava* army is less in number. There are more warriors on the side of *Dūryodhana*. Still, how did this happen in the war?' This is what *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* must know. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* himself was a great war strategist. 'Did some mistake happen in the war? Was there some miscalculation in the army formation?' *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* says this in between the conversation with *Saṅjaya*.

The problem is that *Bhīṣma* won't fight against *Shikhandhi*. *Bhīṣma* himself says to *Dūryodhana* before the war, '*Shikhandhi* was born as a woman. Now he is standing as a man. I am not ready to fight against such a eunuch. I will fight Arjuna, but I cannot fight *Shikhandhi*. Even if he confronts me, I cannot fight. Having rejected *Shikhandhi*, I will fight.'

Bhīṣma says this first to *Duryodhana*, so he knows this matter well. Therefore, *Duryodhana* called all of the army leaders and says,

‘*Shikhandhi* will kill *Bhīṣma*. If *Shikhandhi* uses a weapon, *Bhīṣma* won’t fight back. Therefore, *Shikhandhi* will kill him. Therefore, all of you must protect *Bhīṣma*.’

It says in this chapter, ‘*Bhīṣmanī eva abhirakṣantu*.’ ‘All of you must protect *Bhīṣma*.’ Why does *Duryodhana* say for them to protect *Bhīṣma*? In truth, there is no other person needed to protect the mighty *Bhīṣma*, so this is the reason. This is because *Duryodhana* says to the leaders, ‘*Shikhandhi* will kill *Bhīṣma*.’ *Bhīṣma* won’t fight against *Shikhandhi*. Therefore, all of the 100 sons of *Dhṛitaaṣṭra*, along with *Kṛpācārya* and others, formed a circle to protect *Bhīṣma* from *Shikhandhi*. All of the warriors surround *Bhīṣma* for this purpose and fight.

Dhṛitaraṣṭra knows this matter. *Saṅjaya* knows this. *Duryodhana* knows, that ‘*Bhīṣma* is in danger.’ Thus, keeping this in mind, *Bhīṣma* has fallen in battle, and *Dhṛitaraṣṭra* again asks, ‘what did they do? Why did this mistake happen? Wasn’t there the necessary formations for protecting *Bhīṣma*?’ This is what *Dhṛitaraṣṭra* asks in the first śloka. It says this is in the *Kurukṣetra*, the field of *Dharma*. This is a ‘*dharmic* war’ taking place. However, this ‘*dharmic* war’ is just a name.

After the *Mahābhārata* war began, there were only two severe days where both sides followed the rules of *Dharma*. This is said in the *Mahābhārata*. On the third day of battle, both sides discarded the rules of *Dharma*. In the end, the war was completely *adharmic*. At night, the army attacked and killed the sleeping enemies.

The rule is that ‘one must not fight at night.’ ‘One must not kill one who retreats from battle.’ One must not kill anyone without a weapon.’ All of these rules were broken. The war couldn’t remain in *dharma*. However, the reason that the holy ground of *Kurukṣetra* was selected was so that the war would be *dharmic*. However, that didn’t

last, because that is the nature of war. Once the war has begun, it is difficult to sustain *dharma*.

When *āchāryas* say that war must never be accepted, this is what is meant. War is never an easy way out. It is never possible to sustain dharma through war. War and dharma don't go together. Everyone who participated in the war had to forsake that dharma in the midst of battle. Lord *Vyāsa* makes that very clear through the *Mahābhārata* war.

There is a criticism of the *Gītā*, that 'this scripture encourages war.' 'This encourages people to shed blood and kill.' Some criticize the *Gītā* because of this. However, that is the greatest specialty of *Vyāsa*. No matter what subject Lord *Vyāsa* displays, it will be completely honest. There won't be any kind of partiality, or proving and establishing one view. He presents matters as they are. That is a specialty in all of Lord *Vyāsa's* works.

There is not even a trace of partiality. Partiality is a defect of man's intellect. If something we like does something wrong, we will justify it. If something we don't like does something correctly, we will try to find something wrong with it. This is the partiality of man's intellect.

No matter what subject it is around us, we are unable to see it impartially. We can only see a problem through likes and dislikes. Why is that? It is because attachment and aversion are within the mind. Because of that, 'impartiality' is just a word. That isn't possible for a person influenced by attachment and aversion to follow completely in thought, action, and speech.

However, *Vyāsa's* depiction isn't like that. *Vyāsa* says things about his own mother that an ordinary person wouldn't have the courage to say. In that way, there hasn't been a single writer on this Earth with as much honesty and impartiality. Today, some people with

likes and dislikes have depicted the *Mahābhārata* war. But when Lord *Vyāsa* depicts the, he clearly shows the defects in it.

This war had become unavoidable. We can understand this if we examine the background of the *Mahābhārata* war. That was an event that was unavoidable by anyone. The Lord, *Vyāsa*, *ṛṣis*, *āchāryas*, everyone tried to avoid it. Everyone, including *Vyāsa* and *Saṅjaya* tried. However, that couldn't be avoided, because that can sometimes be unavoidable. Thus, the war had to happen. Because the war was fought for establishing *Dharma*, it is called a '*dharmic* war.'

It started like that, but it didn't last as a *dharmic* war. Many *adharmic* acts happened in that war. *Vyāsa* says each of these matters. Whether it is right, or wrong, it is said exactly as it happened. There is no kind of impurity or concealing.

The meaning of '*Dharmakṣetra*' is 'holy ground.' The reason for selecting this holy ground for the battle was with the aim, 'may both sides follow *dharma*.' '*Kṣetra*' means earth. '*Dharma*' means 'merit.' However, that didn't happen. If it wasn't so, *Bhīṣma* would have never been defeated. *Bhīṣma* wouldn't have fallen.

In that way, if *dharma* was followed, that result wouldn't happen. In the *Mahābhārata*, *Yuddhisthira* was the eldest of the *Pāṇḍavas*. He was the son of *Yama*, *Dharmarāja*, so he is called, '*Dharmaputra*.' He was very disciplined in *Dharma*. It is said that *Dharmaputra's* chariot traveled on the *Kurukṣetra* without touching the ground. This is in the beginning.

However, even *Dharmaputra* himself wasn't able to follow *dharma*. Therefore, when the war began, *Dharmaputra's* chariot began to touch the ground like the other chariots. This is said in the *Mahābhārata*. This is because *Dharma* is destroyed there. That is how

Bhīṣma fell as well. Knowing all of this in the mind, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* asks here, ‘*Dharmakṣetre Kurukṣetre.*’

There, those who have conjoined, desirous of battle, my people.. – this is said out of attachment and affection – ‘my people, and the sons of *Paṇḍa*, what did they do?’ The king asks this to *Saṅjaya*.

‘*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre,*’ in the *Kurukṣetra*, the holy ground, ‘*yuyutsavaḥ samavetaḥ*’ – the word ‘*yuyutsuḥ*’ means ‘one who desires to fight.’ The plural form of this word is ‘*yuyutsavaḥ*’ – those who are desirous of battle. ‘*Samavetaḥ,*’ conjoining together..’ The word ‘*samavetaḥ*’ has a *visarga*, but in the *sandhi* it disappears. In the *śloka*, it appears as ‘*samaveta.*’ Thus, ‘*yuyutsavaḥ samavetaḥ*’ – those who have conjoined together, desirous of battle..

‘*Māmakāḥ Pāṇḍavāḥ cha eva.*’ ‘*Māmakāḥ,*’ my people, ‘*Pāṇḍavāḥ,*’ the *Pāṇḍavas*, ‘*cha eva.*’ Here, there is a criticism of *Vyāsa*. It is said, ‘*chakāro priyaḥ vyāsaḥ.*’ ‘*Vyāsa* is fond of the word ‘*cha.*’ This is because this word ‘*cha*’ is used a lot. In most *ślokas*, it will say, ‘*cha, cha.*’ Some commentators are forced to explain these ‘*cha*’s. However, most don’t feel that obligated to do this.

In other words, if there aren’t enough syllables in a line of the *śloka*, it will create a defect in the rhythm of the chanting. To prevent the breaking of the verse, *Vyāsa* uses here and there the syllables, ‘*cha, ha, vā. eva,* etc.’ These are often used in that way, but some commentators will explain these and imagine meanings for them. However, even if these aren’t explained, there’s no problem.

‘*Mamakāḥ Pāṇḍavāśchaiva.*’ We separated the words, ‘*Pāṇḍavāḥ cha eva.*’ When ‘*cha*’ and ‘*eva*’ are combined, it forms ‘*chaiva.*’ When the word ‘*Pāṇḍavāḥ*’ is joined with ‘*cha,*’ the *visarga* (*ḥ*) becomes ‘*ś.*’ Therefore, it says, ‘*Pāṇḍavāśchaiva.*’ A huge study of Sanskrit isn’t necessary to pick the words of the *Gītā* apart, to understand their

meaning, and join them together and understand the meaning of the *śloka*. These can be understood by anybody in a general way.

‘*Kiṁ akurvata.*’ ‘What did they do?’ The word ‘*akurvata*’ is a verb. ‘What did they do?’ From the beginning of the war, to when *Bhīṣma* falls, what is everything that happened?’ In truth, this is what *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* desires to understand from *Saṅjaya*. The answer is said next by *Saṅjaya*. ‘*Saṅjaya Uvācha.*’

Saṅjaya Uvācha

*Dṛṣṭva tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūdhāṁ dūryodhanas tadā
āchāryam upasaṅgāmya raja vachanam abravīt. 1.2.*

1.2. ‘Having seen the army of the Pandavas drawn up in battle array, King Duryodhana then approached his teacher and spoke these words.’

‘*Tadā,*’ then.. this signifies the beginning of the war. In the beginning of the chapter, it discussed about how both sides came together. *Saṅjaya* is describing from this point. ‘*Tadā,*’ then, what happened? ‘*Rājā Dūryodhanaḥ,*’ the king, *Dūryodhana,* ‘*vyūdhāṁ pāṇḍavānīkaṁ dṛṣṭvā*’ – *Dūryodhana* saw the *vyūdhāṁ*, the diamond formation of the *Pāṇḍava* army. Arjuna is at the front. Here, the word ‘*pāṇḍavānīkaṁ*’ means, ‘*pāṇḍavāṇām anīkaṁ,*’ the army of the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The word ‘*vyūdhāṁ*’ means the formation of the *Pāṇḍava* army. ‘*Dṛṣṭva,*’ having seen the formation of the *Pāṇḍava* army, ‘*āchāryam,*’ his own guru, *Droṇācharya,* ‘*upasaṅgāmya,*’ having approached, ‘*vachanam abravīt,*’ he spoke these words.’

What is the reason for approaching *Droṇa*? The reason is that *Dūryodhana* knows very well about *Bhīṣma*. This is to make sure that *Bhīṣma* is protected. That is why he approaches *Droṇa* and says this.

‘*Bhīṣmamevābhirakṣantu Bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi.*’ It says for everyone to protect *Bhīṣma*. This is because *Dūryodhana* knows that *Shikhandhi* will kill *Bhīṣma*. Therefore, he says that everyone, from *Droṇa* to *Kṛpāchārya* and others, must protect *Bhīṣma*.

They must keep *Bhīṣma* safe, avoiding an attack by *Shikhandhi*. In that way, *Bhīṣma* can destroy the entire *Pāṇḍava* army. *Dūryodhana* knows this. Having this war strategy, he goes and tells this to *Droṇāchārya*. However, *Bhīṣma* has no interest in protecting himself against *Shikhandhi*. If *Shikhandhi* comes, *Bhīṣma* won’t pick up a weapon. That is the strategy of the *Pāṇḍavas*.

Arjuna is situated in front to protect *Shikhandhi*. The *Pāṇḍavas* know that if they protect *Shikhandhi*, they can overcome *Bhīṣma* through *Shikhandhi*’s missiles. Both sides know this. Therefore, *Dūryodhana* knows, ‘if *Bhīṣma* is protected, we will win in the battle.’ That was the calculation of *Dūryodhana*.

After 10 days, there was a great destruction in the *Pāṇḍava* army. However, when the *Kauravas* became unable to protect *Bhīṣma*, the war was changed. This is said in the *Mahābhārata*. It says that *Dūryodhana* commanded 10,000 warriors for each wheel on *Bhīṣma*’s chariot for his protection. The reason for this is to prevent *Shikhandhi* from coming and attacking. In that way, the war began with all protective formations.

Therefore, for reminding everyone of these matters, *Dūryodhana* says, ‘everyone must protect *Bhīṣma*!’ That is the primary war strategy here. For reminding this, *Dūryodhana* approaches his guru and says this. That is why it says, ‘*āchāryam upasamgamya.*’ *Dūryodhana* approaches *Droṇa* and speaks.

