

Gita Flow: chapter 1

Introduction

Dhṛtarāṣṭra is the eldest son of King Vicitravīrya and, by the principle of primogeniture, he should have inherited the kingdom. However, because Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind, the throne passed to his younger brother, Pāṇḍu. Pāṇḍu died prematurely, leaving behind his five young sons, one of whom is Arjuna. Dhṛtarāṣṭra therefore ruled as regent until his nephews came of age.

He never came to terms with the fact that, because of his blindness, the throne would not pass to his own sons, even though they were able-bodied. Thus, along with his eldest son, Duryodhana, he plotted many schemes to kill the Pāṇḍavas. When those failed, he arranged for them to take part in a rigged game of dice, in which they lost their kingdom. The agreement was that, if they were not discovered, they would regain their kingdom after thirteen years.

The sons of Pāṇḍu—the Pāṇḍavas—successfully completed their thirteen years of exile. However, when they returned and asked for their kingdom, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana refused. If the Pāṇḍavas wanted their kingdom, they would have to fight for it.

Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, had descended to the earth at that time. His father, Vasudeva, was the elder brother of Arjuna's mother, Kuntī (also known as Pṛthā). Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were intimate friends, and thus Kṛṣṇa agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer.

1.1: Dhṛtarāṣṭra's question to Sanjaya

1.1: Dhṛtarāṣṭra said: My sons and Pandu's sons have gathered at the sacred ancestral field of the Kurus dynasty, with the intention to fight. Please tell me Sanjaya, what are they going to do now. Has the energy of this holy site influenced my sons to change their minds?

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said (dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca): "My sons and Pandu's sons (māmakāḥ pāṇḍavās caiva) have gathered at the sacred ancestral field of the Kurus dynasty (dharma-kṣetre kuru-kṣetre), with the intention to fight (samavetā yuyutsavaḥ). Please tell me Sanjaya, what are they going to do now (kim akurvata sañjaya). Has the energy of this holy site influenced my sons to change their minds?"

Explanatory note:

My interpretation is influenced by this excerpt from a lecture Srila Prabhupada gave on Bhagavad-gita 1.1 on July 7th, 1973, in London. The excerpt starts 23.04 minutes into the recording.

"Why he is asking question, *kim akurvata*: "What did they do?" Because he was little doubtful that "These boys, after being assembled in *dharma-kṣetra kuru-kṣe...*, they might have changed their ideas. They might have settled up." Actually, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra might have admitted, "Yes, Pāṇḍavas, you are actually the owner. What is the use of unnecessarily fighting?" So he was very much anxious whether they had changed their decision. Therefore he is asking. Otherwise there was no question of asking, *kim akurvata*."

Lecture 1973

2-11: Duryodhana Assesses the Armies and Addresses His Commanders

1.2: Sanjaya replied: Your son Duryodhana looked out at the Pandavas' army and noted their strong military formation. He then went to speak to his military teacher, Drona.

Sanjaya replied (*sañjaya uvāca*): "Your son Duryodhana looked out at the Pandavas' army (*dṛṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānikam*) and noted their strong military formation (*vyūḍham duryodhanas tadā*). He then went to speak to his military teacher, Drona (*ācāryam upasaṅgamyā rājā vacanam abravīt*).

1.3: He said: Acarya Drona, see the Pandavas' powerful army. Note how your own disciple, the intelligent Dhṛṣṭadyumna, has so expertly arranged their military formation.

He said: “Acarya Drona, see the Pandavas’ powerful army (*paśyaitām pāṇḍu-putrāṇām ācārya mahatīm camūm*). Note how your own disciple, the intelligent Dhṛṣṭadyumna, has so expertly arranged their military formation (*vyūḍhām drupada-putreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā*).

Explanatory note:

The name of Droṇa’s disciple, who arranged the military formation of the Pāṇḍavas’ army, was Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Srila Prabhupada points this out in his purport to this verse:

“Droṇācārya knew this perfectly well, and yet as a liberal *brāhmaṇa* he did not hesitate to impart all his military secrets when the son of Drupada, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, was entrusted to him for military education. Now, on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra, Dhṛṣṭadyumna took the side of the Pāṇḍavas, and it was he who arranged for their military phalanx, after having learned the art from Droṇācārya.”

1.4-8: He named some of the chief fighters in the Pandavas’ army and then those in his army.

1.9: Duryodhana continued: There are many other heroes whose names I have not mentioned who are also prepared to die for my cause. All of them are well equipped with different kinds of weapons, and all are experienced warriors.

Duryodhana continued: There are many other heroes whose names I have not mentioned (*anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā*) who are also prepared to die for my cause (*mad-arthe tyakta-jīvitāḥ*). All of them are well equipped with different kinds of weapons (*nānā-śastra-praharaṇāḥ*), and all are experienced warriors (*sarve yuddha-visāradāḥ*).

1.10: My army is much greater numerically, and it is also protected by Grandfather Bhīṣma; whereas the Pandavas have a much smaller army and its most powerful protector

is Bhima who I consider to be like a fig in comparison to Bhisma. Thus I am confident of our victory.

My army is much greater numerically (*aparyāptaṁ tad asmākaṁ*), and it is also protected by Grandfather Bhīṣma (*balāṁ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam*); whereas the Pandavas have a much smaller army (*paryāptaṁ tv idam eteṣāṁ*) and its most powerful protector is Bhima (*balāṁ bhīmābhirakṣitam*) who I consider to be like a fig in comparison to Bhisma. Thus I am confident of our victory.

Explanatory note:

My expansion of Duryodhana’s intended meaning is based on Srila Prabhupada’s purport to this verse:

“On the other hand, the forces of the Pāṇḍavas are limited, being protected by a less experienced general, Bhīma, who is like a fig in the presence of Bhīṣma. Duryodhana was was confident of his victory on account of the presence of Bhīṣma, who was a far superior general.”

1.11: Duryodhana then became concerned that the other generals might feel overlooked, so he addressed them: All of you must give your full support to Grandfather Bhīṣma, and each of you should remain carefully stationed in your respective positions to protect him from all sides.

Duryodhana then became concerned that the other generals might feel overlooked, so he addressed them: All of you must give your full support to Grandfather Bhīṣma (*bhīṣmam evābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi*), and each of you should remain carefully stationed in your respective positions (*ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathā-bhāgam avasthitāḥ*) to protect him from all sides.

Explanatory Note:

My interpretation of Duryodhana’s motives for speaking this verse is based on Srila Prabhupada’s purport to this verse:

“Duryodhana, after praising the prowess of Bhīṣma, further considered that others might think that they had been considered less important, so in his usual diplomatic way, he tried

to adjust the situation in the above words. He emphasized that Bhīṣmadeva was undoubtedly the greatest hero, but he was an old man, so everyone must especially think of his protection from all sides.”

1.12-19: The Call to Battle

1.12: Bhīṣma, the grandfather of the Kuru dynasty knew Duryodhana was worried. To cheer him up, he blew his conch shell, and the sound resembled the roaring of a lion.

Bhīṣma, the grandfather of the Kuru dynasty (*kuru-vṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ*) knew Duryodhana was worried. To cheer him up (*tasya sañjanayan harṣam*), he blew his conch shell (*śaṅkhaṁ dadhmau pratāpavān*), and the sound resembled the roaring of a lion (*simha-nādam vinadyoccaiḥ*).

Explanatory Note:

My unpacking of Bhisma’s intention is based on this passage from Srila Prabhupada’s purport to this verse:

“The grandsire of the Kuru dynasty could understand the inner meaning of the heart of his grandson Duryodhana, and out of his natural compassion for him he tried to cheer him by blowing his conchshell very loudly, befitting his position as a lion.”

1.13: Suddenly, the other fighters on Duryodhana’s side blew their conches. Some also blew bugles, trumpets, and horns, and others beat drums. When all the instruments were played simultaneously, they created a tremendous sound.

Suddenly, the other fighters on Duryodhana’s side blew their conches. Some also blew bugles, trumpets, and horns, and others beat drums (tataḥ śaṅkhās ca bheryās ca paṇavānaka-gomukhāḥ). When all the instruments were played simultaneously, they created a tremendous sound (sahasaivābhyahanyanta sa śabdāḥ tumulo ’bhavat).

1.14-15: On the other side of the battlefield, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, seated on their great chariot, drawn by white horses, blew their conchshells which were imbued with spiritual potency. Lord Kṛṣṇa blew his conchshell called Pancajanya, and Arjuna blew his, Devadatta. The powerful hero, Bhīma, blew his tremendous conchshell, Paundra.

1.16-19: All the other fighters on Yudhiṣṭhira's side also blew their conches. Among them were Yudhiṣṭhira's Ananta-vijaya, Nakula's Sughoṣa, and Sahadeva's Maṇipuṣpaka. The combined uproar resounded everywhere — on land and in the sky — terrifying Duryodhana and his brothers.

1.20-27: Arjuna Surveys the Armies

1.20–23: Grasping his bow and arrows, Arjuna stood on his chariot, marked with the flag of Hanumān. He carefully surveyed his cousins, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, who stood at the head of the opposing army. Then he addressed his charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, as follows:

You are Acyuta—infallible—because neither Your power nor Your affection for Your devotee is ever compromised. Therefore, being Your devotee, I confidently depend on You. Please draw my chariot between the two armies. I want to see which of my friends and relatives have sided with the evil Duryodhana.

Explanatory Note:

Arjuna addressed Kṛṣṇa as 'Acyuta', 'O infallible one'. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that by referring to Kṛṣṇa as 'Acyuta' in this context, Arjuna is hinting that he is confident he can depend on Kṛṣṇa to do as he asks.

"He is addressing Acyuta. Acyuta, Kṛṣṇa, agreed to become his chariot driver. Therefore he is purposefully using this word *acyuta*. "Because I know You are the Supreme Lord, and I am ordering You, but because You promised that You will carry my order, Acyuta, You never fail in Your work." So God's another name is Acyuta. God never falls down." [Room Conversation in Poona on December 22nd 1976](#)

Baladeva Vidyabhūṣaṇa gives further insight into the word Acyuta in his commentary to this verse:

“O Acyuta, you do not deviate (acyuta) from your innate nature—from your affection for your devotee, or from your supreme power. Controlled by this quality, without fear, place my chariot according to my words, the words of Your devotee.’.....I wish to see at the beginning of the battle those friends and relatives.....against whom I will fight.” Gita Bhusana 1.20-23 commentary.

I have tried to incorporate these insights into my unpacking of these verses.

1.24–25: Kṛṣṇa drove the chariot into the middle of the battlefield and positioned it where Arjuna could clearly see both armies. As Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and all the other heroes looked on, Kṛṣṇa addressed Arjuna in a light-hearted tone: Well, Arjuna, because you are My aunt Pṛthā’s son, I have agreed to be your charioteer. Now that you can see all the Kurus who have come out to fight with you, I hope you will not change your mind about fighting.

Explanatory Note:

My interpretation of this verse is influenced by this excerpt from Srila Prabhpuada’s purport to verse 25:

“As a friend, He wanted to inform Arjuna that because Arjuna was the son of Pṛthā, the sister of His own father Vasudeva, He had agreed to be the charioteer of Arjuna. Now what did Kṛṣṇa mean when He told Arjuna to “behold the Kurus”? Did Arjuna want to stop there and not fight? Kṛṣṇa never expected such things from the son of His aunt Pṛthā. The mind of Arjuna was thus predicted by the Lord in friendly joking.”

1.26: From where he stood, Arjuna could see both armies. Looking from one party to the other, he saw elders who were like fathers and grandfathers to him. He saw his teachers, maternal uncles and brothers. He saw his young sons and grandsons as well as friends along with his fathers-in-law and many well-wishers.

From where he stood, Arjuna could see both armies (*atrāpaśyat sthitān pārthaḥ*). Looking from one party to the other (*senayor ubhayor api*), he saw elders who were like fathers and grandfathers to him (*pitṛn atha pitāmahān*). He saw his teachers, maternal uncles and brothers (*ācāryān mātulān bhrātṛn*). He saw his young sons and grandsons as well as friends (*putrān pautrān sakhīms tathā*) along with his fathers-in-law and many well-wishers (*śvaśurān suhṛdaś caiva*).

1.27: When Kuntī's son saw all his relatives and friends ready to kill each other, he became dismayed at the thought that soon many of them would be dead or wounded. In this distressed state he addressed Kṛṣṇa.

When Kuntī's son saw all his relatives and friends ready to kill each other (*tān samīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān bandhūn avasthitān*), he became dismayed at the thought that soon many of them would be dead or wounded (*kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo*). In this distressed state he addressed Kṛṣṇa (*viṣṭdann idam abravīt*).

Explanatory note:

In trying to understand Bhagavad-gītā, I always endeavour to capture the intended meaning in my own words. This habit is in conformity with Improving Saṅga's Principle 4: repeat the meaning in our own words. I mention this because you might be wondering where in the verse it says that anyone would soon be dead or wounded. It doesn't. This is my attempt to express Arjuna's feeling of being overwhelmed with compassion.

1.28-46: Arjuna refuses to fight

1.28-29: He said: I am devastated to see all these people I love ready to fight me. My entire body is shaking, my mouth is dry, I have goosebumps and my skin feels hot. I am so upset I cannot even hold onto my bow.

1.30: Kṛṣṇa, I do not feel able to remain here on the battlefield. I am so confused about what I should do that I have become dizzy and feel as if I could faint at any moment. It

seems to me that whatever I do will lead to suffering. Even if I win the kingdom, I will suffer remorse. Thus, I see no good outcome, no matter what I do.

“Kṛṣṇa, I do not feel able to remain here on the battlefield (na ca śaknomy avasthātum). I am so confused about what I should do that I have become dizzy and feel as if I could faint at any moment (bhramatīva ca me manaḥ). It seems to me that whatever I do will lead to suffering. Even if I win the kingdom, I will suffer remorse. Thus, I see no good outcome, no matter what I do (nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava).”

Explanatory note:

I have tried to combine different perspectives in my unpacking. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa describes Arjuna as feeling dizzy and faint:

“ ‘I cannot even (ca) remain steady and my mind seems to whirl about.’ This indicates the appearance of weakness and fainting. ‘I see the opposite results (viparitani nimittani) in this war: being victorious and gaining a kingdom will not give me bliss; rather it will give the opposite, remorse.’ Nimitta means ‘result,’ as in the usage ‘For what purpose (nimitta) are you living here?’” *Gita Bhusana* 1.30 commentary.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says he is forgetting himself:

“Due to his impatience, Arjuna was unable to stay on the battlefield, and he was forgetting himself on account of this weakness of his mind.” Bg 1.30 purport

I understand this to mean that he is forgetting his real nature and duty as a spirit soul. When we do not know our actual nature, we cannot understand the cause of, or the solution to, our suffering. The following reference supports this understanding.

“That Sanātana Gosvāmī did when he approached Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He inquired from Him, ke āmi kene āmāya jāre tāpa-traya [Cc. Madhya 20.102] = “My dear Lord, kindly let me know who am I and why I am put into the threefold miserable condition of life.” Then one can say, “You are minister. You know what you are.” Then he says, “No, actually I do not know what I am.”” [lecture on Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.2.11, April 26th, 1974 in Tirupati](#)

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s perspective also aligns with what Arjuna will express more clearly in Chapter 2, Text 7:

Arjuna is admitting that he has forgotten his actual nature and corresponding duty: “Yes,”

kārpaṇya-doṣa, kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ [Bg. 2.7], "my natural duty I am forgetting."

[Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 2.7, on August 7th, 1973, in London](#)

1.31–35: How can any good come from killing my own relatives? I have no interest in victory in battle or regaining my kingdom. Kṛṣṇa, you are known as Govinda, the giver of happiness to all. Surely you understand that a kingdom, worldly pleasures, or even life itself have no value for me if those whose happiness I desire are standing here ready to fight me. You are famous as Madhusūdana because you killed the demon Madhu, but these men are not demons. They are my teachers, men who have been like fathers to me, boys who are like sons, and others who are like grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and relatives. I will not kill them, even if it means I will be killed. Even if I were to gain rulership over all the planetary systems, I would still not kill them, what to speak of this earth. How can I do such a sinful act for a temporary semblance of happiness in this life? You are known as Janārdana—destroyer of people. If they must be killed for the sake of righteousness, then You, who do not incur sin, may do so.

Explanatory note:

Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa by three different names in this section: Govinda, Madhusūdana, and Janārdana.

My interpretation of Govinda is taken from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to these verses: "Arjuna has addressed Lord Kṛṣṇa as Govinda because Kṛṣṇa is the object of all pleasures for cows and the senses. By using this significant word, Arjuna indicates that Kṛṣṇa should understand what will satisfy Arjuna's senses."

My interpretation of Madhusūdana is taken from a lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda gave on these verses:

"My dear Kṛṣṇa, Madhusūdana." He is not addressing Kṛṣṇa as "Kṛṣṇa." He is addressing Him, "Madhusūdana." He is reminding Him that "You also kill, but You kill Your enemies, Madhu." Madhu was a demon. Madhu-kaiṭabha-bhare hari-murāre. Madhu-kaiṭabha-bhare. So, "You are Madhusūdana. You are the killer of Madhu demon, who was Your enemy. You

are not Nanda-sūdana or Yaśodā-sūdana." That is reminding Him, little critically, that "You are Yourself Madhusūdana. You kill only Your enemies. Why You are inducing me to kill my kinsmen?" This is the criticism." [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 1.32–35, July 25th, 1973, in London.](#)

My interpretation of Janārdana is taken primarily from Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary to this verse:

"Having killed Duryodhana and others, what peace would we Pandavas who remain have? None at all. It is not proper to kill brothers for a temporary semblance of happiness, but which will lead to long term suffering in hell. O Janaradana (destroyer of people), if they are to be killed, then You, who have come to relieve the earth of its burden, should kill them. It is not possible for You, the Supreme Lord, to suffer the effects of sin at all in killing them."

Bhānu Swāmī explains in a note: "jana means 'people' and ardana means 'destruction or pain'."

However, in his word-for-word section, Śrīla Prabhupāda translates Janārdana as "O maintainer of all living entities". Baladeva's interpretation reflects the more direct, literal sense of the word, while Śrīla Prabhupāda's brings out an interpretive meaning aligned with Kṛṣṇa's role as protector. In my interpretive unpacking, I have tried to incorporate both perspectives.

1.36: Even though they instigated the hostility, I think it would be sinful to kill them. Therefore, it would be irreligious for me to kill Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons along with my kinsmen. Kṛṣṇa, as the husband of the Goddess of Fortune, please tell me what possible benefit there could be in killing them, and how that would make me happy.

Even though they instigated the hostility, I think it would be sinful to kill them (pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ). Therefore, it would be irreligious for me to kill Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons along with my kinsmen (tasmān nārhā vayan̄ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān sabāndhavān). Kṛṣṇa, as the husband of the Goddess of Fortune, please tell me what possible benefit there could be in killing them, and how that would make me happy (sva-janam hi katham hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma).

Explanatory note:

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to this verse:

“According to Vedic injunctions there are six kinds of aggressors: (1) a poison giver, (2) one who sets fire to the house, (3) one who attacks with deadly weapons, (4) one who plunders riches, (5) one who occupies another’s land, and (6) one who kidnaps a wife. Such aggressors are at once to be killed, and no sin is incurred by killing such aggressors. Such killing of aggressors is quite befitting any ordinary man, but Arjuna was not an ordinary person.”

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura say that in this verse Arjuna is replying to this implied objection.

Viśvanātha writes: “Thus the scriptures prescribe killing in the case of aggressors. Arjuna answers with this verse.” *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 1.36 commentary.

Baladeva writes: “‘Therefore by scriptural injunction, it is justified to kill these six types of aggressors.’ In this verse, he replies to this argument.” *Gita Bhusana* 1.36 commentary.

Kṛṣṇa’s unspoken comment: If it is sinful to kill one’s family members, how is it that the warriors on the opposite side have challenged you to battle? As a kṣatriya, it is your duty to accept the challenge.

Explanatory note:

According to both Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, there is an unspoken objection by Kṛṣṇa between verses 36 and 37.

“‘Why does the opposing side want to fight then?’ He answers with this verse.” c

“‘But it is justified to take part in this war since they have invoked it. The scriptures say that it is understood for the kṣatriya that he should not reject either a game of dice or a fight if challenged: āhūto na nivarteta dyūtād api raṇād api.’ (Mahābhārata, 3.56.8)” *Gita Bhusana* 1.37–38 commentary.

1.37–38: Arjuna said: The other side do not recognise any problem because their judgement is obscured by greed. Thus, they are blind to the sin involved in killing one’s family and friends. That does not mean I, who know better, should participate in this sinful act. Unlike them, Janārdana, I clearly see the fault in destroying the family.

Arjuna said: The other side do not recognise any problem because their judgement is obscured by greed (yady apy ete na paśyanti lobhopahata-cetasah). Thus, they are blind to the sin involved in killing one’s family and friends (kula-kṣaya-kṛtam doṣam mitra-drohe ca pātakam). That does not mean I, who know better, should participate in this sinful act (katham na jñeyam asmābhiḥ pāpād asmān nivartitum). Unlike them, Janārdana, I clearly see the fault in destroying the family (kula-kṣaya-kṛtam doṣam).

1.39: With the death of all the men in a family, the codes of right conduct and the traditions of formal worship which were passed down from generation to generation are destroyed. The rest of the family will then drift away from a God-centred life and behave in ways that are harmful to themselves and to society.

With the death of all the men in a family (kula-kṣaye praṇaśyanti), the codes of right conduct and the traditions of formal worship which were passed down from generation to generation are destroyed (kula-dharmāḥ sanātanāḥ). The rest of the family will then drift away from a God-centred life and behave in ways that are harmful to themselves and to society (dharme naṣṭe kulam kṛtsnam adharmo ’bhibhavaty uta).

Explanatory note:

I have unpacked Śrīla Prabhupāda’s phrase “the destruction of the dynasty” as “the death of all the men in a family” for two reasons.

First, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa writes:

“With the destruction of performance of religious activities, irreligion will conquer

(abhibhavati) even (uta) all the remaining family members consisting of small children and others.” *Gita Bhusana* 1.39 commentary.

I understand the “and others” to refer to the women of the family. Second, the next verse indicates that the women survive the destruction of the dynasty to which Arjuna is referring.

In unpacking “the eternal family tradition,” I have drawn on two perspectives from the ācāryas. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura emphasises right conduct, which I have expressed as “the codes of right conduct.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa highlights religious practices such as fire sacrifice, which I have expressed as “the traditions of formal worship passed down from generation to generation.”

“The right conduct maintained by the family which has been passed down through many generations (sanātanāḥ kula-dharmāḥ) will be destroyed with the destruction of the family (kula-kṣaye).” *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 1.39 commentary.

“The religious activities such as fire sacrifice (kula-dharmāḥ), which have been obtained through family traditions (sanātanāḥ), will be destroyed....” *Gita Bhusana* 1.39 commentary.

1.40: Kṛṣṇa, when families become immoral and give up their God-centred way of life, the women in those families become prone to engaging in extramarital relationships. Consequently, O descendant of Vṛṣṇi, they have illegitimate children who lack discipline and a sense of their duties, thus creating serious problems in society.

Kṛṣṇa, when families become immoral and give up their God-centred way of life (adharmābhibhavāt kṛṣṇa), the women in those families become prone to engaging in extramarital relationships (praduṣyanti kula-striyaḥ). Consequently, O descendant of Vṛṣṇi, they have illegitimate children who lack discipline and a sense of their duties, thus creating serious problems in society (strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇa-saṅkaraḥ).

Explanatory note:

My unpacking of “degradation of womanhood” as “vulnerable to extra-marital sex” is influenced by both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s reference to “vows of chastity” and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s reference to “becoming adulterous”:

“...so the women, afflicted with ignorance, thinking that they may engage in sin, being made to defy vows of chastity by us, will become corrupted.” *Gita Bhusana* 1.40 commentary.

“When adharma is prevalent, the women of the family will become spoiled (praduṣyanti) by becoming adulterous.” *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 1.40 commentary.

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *varṇa-saṅkaraḥ* as “unwanted progeny”. The term can also be understood as referring to “mixed caste”:

“The mixture of caste in the family leads to hell for those who destroy the family and its traditions.” *Gita Bhusana* 1.41 commentary.

Śrīla Prabhupāda at times alludes to this sense:

“If you allow the woman to be polluted, then there will be *varṇa-saṅkaraḥ*. You cannot distinguish who is brāhmaṇa, who is a kṣatriya, who is a vaiśya.” [Lecture on Srimad Bhagavatam 6.1.41 on July 22nd, 1975, in Los Angeles.](#)

However, he more commonly explains *varṇa-saṅkara* as “illegitimate children”, a concept that is easier to relate to in the present context:

“In the Bhagavad-gītā it is said, when there are *varṇa-saṅkara*, illegitimate children, the whole world becomes hellish.” [Press Conference on June 26th, 1971, in Paris.](#)

This is the term I have used in my unpacking. Such children may be unwanted in one sense because they were not intended by their parents. In another sense, they are socially unwanted because they create disorder:

“If the women are not married, then *varṇa-saṅkara* population will increase... and as soon as there is *varṇa-saṅkara* population, the whole world will be in chaotic condition.” [Lecture at World Health Organization on June 6th, 1974, in Geneva.](#)

In my unpacking, I have also described them as lacking discipline and a sense of their duties. This is my attempt to understand what makes *varṇa-saṅkara*—whether understood as mixed caste or illegitimate children—a problem for society. This understanding is shaped by statements such as:

“The exact example of *varṇa-saṅkara* is the hippies at the present moment... So these unwanted children, without being trained up in the *varṇāśrama* system, they become the cause of hellish life...” [Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 1.41-42 on July 29th, 1973, in London.](#)

The phrase “without being trained up in the varṇāśrama system” indicates to me that they are not trained in the self-discipline and duties appropriate to their nature.

1.41: When the number of illegitimate children in society increases, they create misery both for their own families and for society in general, which allowed the destruction of the traditional family unit to take place. Even the deceased ancestors of such families suffer, for no one performs the piṇḍa ceremony for their spiritual upliftment.

When the number of illegitimate children in society increases, they create misery both for their own families and for society in general, which allowed the destruction of the traditional family unit to take place (saṅkaro narakāyaiva kula-ghnānām kulasya ca). Even the deceased ancestors of such families suffer, for no one performs the piṇḍa ceremony for their spiritual upliftment (patanti pitaro hy eṣām lupta-piṇḍodaka-kriyāḥ).

Explanatory Note:

Piṇḍa is an offering of Kṛṣṇa prasāda to forefathers to release them from ghostly existence.

“Therefore the lupta-piṇḍodaka-kriyāḥ [Bg. 1.41]. Taking for granted that some of my forefathers have become ghostly life and has not got the gross body, so by this piṇḍodaka...

Piṇḍa means offering prasādam of Viṣṇu prasādam.” [Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 1.41-42, on July 29th, 1973 in London.](#)

1.42: Those responsible for destroying the traditional family are also responsible for these evil consequences: the moral and spiritual degradation of society, women engaging in extramarital relationships, and the proliferation of illegitimate children. Consequently, they are also responsible for the destruction of community projects—such as providing for the vulnerable—and family welfare activities, such as taking proper care of elderly family members and children.

Those responsible for destroying the traditional family are also responsible for these evil consequences: the moral and spiritual degradation of society, women engaging in extramarital relationships, and the proliferation of illegitimate children (doṣair etaiḥ kula-ghnānām varṇa-saṅkara-kāraḥ). Consequently, they are also responsible for the

destruction of community projects—such as providing for the vulnerable—and family welfare activities, such as taking proper care of elderly family members and children. (utsādyante jāti-dharmāḥ kula-dharmās ca śāśvatāḥ).

1.43: O Kṛṣṇa, those who are raised in spiritually dysfunctional families which do not instil in them discipline or a sense of duty inevitably go to hell. This is not my opinion, but what I have heard from spiritual authorities.

O Kṛṣṇa, those who are raised in spiritually dysfunctional families which do not instil in them discipline or a sense of duty (utsanna-kula-dharmāṇām manuṣyāṇām janārdana) inevitably go to hell (narake niyataṁ vāso). This is not my opinion, but what I have heard from spiritual authorities (bhavatīty anuśūruma).

Explanatory note:

My unpacking is based on this insight from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to this verse:

“Arjuna bases his argument not on his own personal experience, but on what he has heard from the authorities.”

1.44: How unfortunate that we have resolved to commit the great sin of killing our own kinsmen, motivated by the selfish desire to enjoy royal privileges.

How unfortunate that we have resolved to commit the great sin of killing our own kinsmen (aho bata mahat pāpam kartum vyavasitā vayam), motivated by the selfish desire to enjoy royal privileges (yad rājya-sukha-lobhena hantum sva-janam udyatāḥ).

Kṛṣṇa’s unspoken comment: Even if you do not wish to fight, they are intent on killing you.

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa brings out this implied point:

“Even if you are disinclined to fight, Bhima and others are inclined to fight and will kill you. So what is to be done?” *Gita Bhūṣaṇa* 1.45 commentary.

1.45: I will not take up arms nor will I resist, even if they attack me with their weapons. If Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons kill me, that will be more beneficial for me than if I kill them. Such a death will be my atonement for the sin of thinking of killing my relatives.

I will not take up arms nor will I resist, even if they attack me with their weapons (yadi mām apratīkāram aśastraṁ śastra-pāṇayah). If Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons kill me, that will be more beneficial for me than if I kill them (dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus tan me kṣema-taraṁ bhavet). Such a death will be my atonement for the sin of thinking of killing my relatives.

Explanatory note:

“Not opposing them will be my prāyaścitta for the sin of thinking of killing relatives. This is most beneficial (kṣema-taram)—removing sin just by this prāyaścitta at the end of life (when they kill me). And Bhīṣma and others will also not incur sin by killing me in this manner.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 1.45 commentary.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the meaning of *prāyaścitta* in his purport to verse 1.43:

“One who is always engaged in sinful activities must utilise the process of atonement, called prāyaścitta.”

Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s unspoken comment: Then what happened?

Explanatory note:

“Then what happened?’ Sanjaya then replied with this verse.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 1.46 commentary.

1.46: Sañjaya said: When he had finished speaking, Arjuna sat down in his chariot, right there in the middle of the battlefield. Feeling overwhelmed with sadness, he cast aside his bow and arrows.

Sañjaya said (sañjaya uvāca): When he had finished speaking, Arjuna sat down in his chariot, right there in the middle of the battlefield (evam uktvārjunaḥ saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśat). Feeling overwhelmed with sadness, he cast aside his bow and arrows (viśṛjya sa-śaraṁ cāpaṁ śoka-saṁvigna-mānasaḥ).

BRIEF CHAPTER SUMMARY:

King Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sañjaya what is happening at Kurukṣetra, where his sons and nephews have assembled to fight. In reply, Sañjaya describes Duryodhana's inspection of the opposing army and his attempt to rally his commanders. The armies then sound their conches, and the battlefield fills with a powerful display of war.

Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to place his chariot between the two armies. Seeing his relatives and teachers on both sides, he is overcome with grief. Unable to see any good outcome, he rejects victory and argues that the war will destroy family life and social order. He refuses to fight and collapses in despair.