

*Dharmakṣetra; Kurukṣetra; Karmaṇighora*

*Dharma* Field; Kuru Field; Violent, Gory Combat

Reading the *Bhagavadgītā* in its *Mahābhāratan* Combat Context as a Sacred Source for  
Understanding and Preparing for the Impact of Nonphysical Postcombat Trauma

Reverend Brooks St. Clair Morton

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Abstract:

Rita Brock and Gabriella Lettini ask in *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*, “Is there an adequate psychological and spiritual preparation for the consequences of killing?” I use their question to bridge emerging combat trauma literature (ECTL) with the ancient Hindu sacred sources, the *Bhagavadgītā* (*Bg*) in the *Mahābhārata* (*Mbha*). In this thesis, I make two general contributions. First, I read the *Bg* in its epic *Mhbn* combat context seeking ancient insight into nonphysical combat trauma. Secondly, I provide a clear ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological voice to read ECTL critically. Thus, to borrow Anthony Thiselton’s metaphor, I “bridge the horizons” of both disciplines with the following hypothesis: In the *Bg*, Kṛṣṇa prepared Arjuna for killing by correcting (re-ordered) Arjuna from a state of *guṇa-karma* epistemological disorder to a state of combat readiness. Yet, Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* (“correction”) did not insulate Arjuna from the negative impact of “violent, gory combat” (*karmaṇighora*). Thus, the post-*Gītā* Arjuna struggled to remain combat ready and effective, true to his declaration, “I stand as one who no longer doubts. I will accomplish your command” (*Bg* 18.73). In Part 1, I critically read ECTL and the symbolic and political commentators of the *Bg*. In Part 2, I categorize the nonphysical combat trauma of *karmaṇighora* at Kuruksetra. Then, I examine the terms describing Arjuna’s *dharma* crisis. Next, I examine Kṛṣṇa’s restorative response in the following imperatives “see” (*paśya*), “patiently endure” (*titikṣasva*), “know” (*viddhi*), and  $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$  (*uttiṣṭha*, “stand up,”), highlighting the revelation of Sthānu advancing before him in battle. Finally, I provide accounts of how *karmaṇighora* impacted Arjuna and other *kṣatriyas* over the 18-day war. I conclude by reflecting on two emerging inquiries: Does Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* adequately prepare Arjuna for killing at Kuruksetra? Is there such a thing as a soul wound in the *Bg* in its *Mhbn* combat context?

“I Have a Rendezvous with Death”

I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple-blossoms fill the air—  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath—  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear ...  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

Alan Seeger

*A Treasury of War Poetry* (1917)

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## Introduction

### Purpose & Need of Study

The general purpose of this thesis is two-fold.

First, this project moves toward reading *The Bhagavadgītā* as it is in its *Mahābhāratan* combat context.<sup>1</sup> I am specifically interested in examining components of Kṛṣṇa's *guṇa-karma* epistemologically natured response to Arjuna's crisis. At the beginning of the dialogue, Arjuna was swept away by the swell of the *guṇas*, which caused powerfully traumatic experiences in his interior life. Consequently, he misperceived the nature of the battlefield and wrongly reasoned his following action according to *dharma*. Reading the *Mhba* in its combat context means I am searching for insight into how the ancient epic portrays and responds to the types of wounds that scholars and clinicians find in contemporary warriors. I draw upon two statements from Jonathon Shay's introduction to *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay writes, "The thrust of this work is that the epic gives center stage to bitter experiences that actually do arise in war; further, it makes the claim that Homer has seen things that we in psychiatry and psychology have more or less missed." I would

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<sup>1</sup> From now on, all references to *The Bhagavadgītā* and *The Mahābhārata* will be abbreviated by *Bg* and *Mhba(n)*. Regarding the *devanāgarī* text of the *Bg*, I have used Winthrop Sargeant's translation, edited by Christopher Chapple (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984). Unless noted, translations will be my own. All transliterations are consistent with Sargeant. On some occasions, I reference a popular translation of the *Bg* because it represents a dominant tradition discussed in this project. Regarding the *Mhba*, I have utilized Kisari Mohan Ganguli's translation which is easily available online. Most quotations from the *Mhba* are from K. Ganguli's English translation, but also M. N. Dutt's, or J. A. B. van Buitenen. I do translate large sections of the *Mhba*. In Ch. 4, I use a thematic approach to show the reader the enormity of phenomena as they appear in the war, such as grief, anger, and examples of beauty. A more detailed exegetical work, and, or word study would be a worthy pursuit. When I reference Ganguli's English translation, I use the format as it is found, e.g., *Vana Parvan*, X-XII. When I reference the Sanskrit text, I use the format as it is found, e.g., *Vana Parvan*, 6.38, and it will be my translation. Ganguli's translation can be accessed at <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/index.htm>. Though I use the physical copy of Monier Moneir-William's indispensable work, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, I have also utilized the online resource for an expedited method of searching for Sanskrit terms ([www.sanskritdictionary.com](http://www.sanskritdictionary.com)). I am also indebted to Vettam Mani's *Purāṇic Encyclopedia* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2006).

add the discipline of Hindu Studies. As goes the *Illiad*, so too the *Mhba*, for the narrator Sañjaya has “seen things” *via* supernatural gifting by Vyāsa that deserve more significant exposure to scholars desiring to understand the nonphysical, traumatic phenomenological toll of war. When Sañjaya recounts the inner turmoil within the hearts of the armies, it is no speculation. It is divinely gifted insight. He sees the heart and actions of those who are present, and he sees it all.

Shay wrote thirty years ago, “The perspective of the combat soldier has never been applied in any systematic way to understanding the *Iliad*. It is a privilege to say anything new about a work of art so great that it survived the crash of the Greek civilization that created it and of later civilizations that passed it on.”<sup>2</sup> The ancient Indic Valley civilization has risen and gone the way of time. Still, because of its most significant contribution, we, too, may discover a perspective of combat trauma from the *Bg* as it is in its final form within the *Mhbn* epic. Like Shay, it is my privilege to do the same with these ancient sources from a world very foreign to western civilization. Sañjaya’s narration of the war no less “gives center stage to bitter” experiences at Kurkṣetra.<sup>3</sup> Arjuna’s crisis in the *Bg*, Kṛṣṇa’s teaching, and Arjuna’s (and others) actions over the 18 days of brutal fighting provide a unique perspective for warriors who have struggled with nonphysical trauma. Prominent Hindu commentators refer to the war, but a gap remains because few emphasize the physical phenomena of the war.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the compilers of the epic went into great detail to describe the far-reaching consequences of fighting and killing. Re-reading the *Bg* in its combat context illuminates the abundance of phenomena, highlighting his combat experience after

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<sup>2</sup> Shay, Jonathan, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (Touchstone: New York, 1995), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Tradition and textual accounts provide the identities of several authors. Sañjaya is credited for narrating the war. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Pārāśara, commonly referred to as Vyāsa, is credited as the compiler. However, he is also an “active character” in the epic. However, most of the epic (poem) is performed by Vaiśampāyana long after the war for Yudhiṣṭhira’s grandson. The conveyer of the overall epic is Ugrasravas. See the beginning of the introduction of Kevin McGrath’s, *Vyāsa Redux: Narrative in Epic Mahābhārata* (Anthem Press: New York, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 3.

the scene of his morning counsel with Kṛṣṇa. Most importantly, it reveals a model of a human who experienced a full range of emotions (traumas) before, in, and after combat.

Secondly, this project introduces the *Bg* in the *Mhba* as a sacred source for understanding postcombat, nonphysical trauma. Unfortunately, there are few robust, exegetical and theological contributions in emerging combat trauma literature (ECTL), and fewer from the Hindu tradition, specifically, the *Bg*. Working toward filling these gaps, I re-read the *Bg* in the *Mhba* in response to the research question first posed by Brock and Lettini in *Soul Repair*. Is there an “adequate preparation for the psychological and spiritual consequences of killing [in combat]?”<sup>5</sup> Building upon their question, I focus on the theological components existing alongside psychology.<sup>6</sup> I will show that the *Bg* presents an epistemologically structured “preparation” that continues the conversation surrounding how ECTL is evolving from its origins in clinical psychology.

A review of ECTL shows that the discipline has yet to canonize categories like moral injury, soul wound, and soul repair.<sup>7</sup> Clarity is proving difficult because one dominant tradition has not provided a defining ontological/theological perspective. Yet, there are significant contributions from the Christian tradition, e.g., the recently edited anthology *War and Moral Injury* by Robert Emmet Meagher and Douglas A. Pryer and *Full Darkness: Original Sin, Moral Injury and Wartime Violence* by Brian S. Powers.<sup>8</sup> ECTL is changing, but psychology-based literature still greatly overshadows theological reflection. ECTL is and will remain a field dominated by psychology in the near future. The lack of dominant traditions with distinct textually based, ontological, and theological perspectives has led to a degree of ‘soul ambiguity.’ Scholars

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<sup>5</sup> Brock, Lettini, *Soul Repair* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 18. See Manlantes, Karl, *What It is Like to Go to War* (Berkeley: Atlantic Books, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> I understand spirituality as a pragmatic dimension of theology.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> See also, Tom Frame, “Moral Injury and the Influence of Christian Religious Convictions,” in *War and Moral Injury*, ed. Robert Emmet Meagher and Douglas A. Pryer (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 128.

interchangeably use terms like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), moral injury, and soul wound. The soul talk inevitably becomes ambiguous. However, set in its *Mhbn* combat context, the *Bg* becomes a distinct perspective offering *soul clarity* to the phenomenon presently known as soul wound, moral injury, and other facets of nonphysical combat trauma.

### **Reading the *Bhagavadgītā* in its Combat Context**

Angelika Malinar summarized the three phases of the evolution of modern approaches to reading the *Bg*. First, in the early nineteenth century, European, academic, and theosophical interests focused on Vedic literature and the Sanskrit text. Second, following that trend was the dawn of the twentieth century ushered in a “surge” of new translations, interpretations, and commentaries. Third, from the mid-twentieth century onward, one finds a “holistic” hermeneutic that understands the *Bg* as a coherent, philosophical development of earlier doctrines from earlier sources, e.g., the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*.<sup>9</sup> More broadly, Malinar categorizes the history of interpretation into two camps, “analysts” and “unitarians.” The former two are characteristic of the analytic tradition, emphasizing historicity and text-criticism; the latter is typical of the unitary or holistic practice of interpretation. Concerning the “unitarian” tradition of interpretation, I also read the text as a whole, as it is, at ‘face value,’ a unified message from the mouth of the Hindu Supreme Being, Kṛṣṇa.<sup>10</sup>

I disagree with Franklin Edgerton, who would judge the historical combat context as nonsense.<sup>11</sup> Yet, I grant much of McGrath’s conclusion that the *Mhbn* universe is a “hypothetical

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<sup>9</sup> Malinar, Angelika, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18. Malinar mentions a distinctly Marxist nature.

<sup>10</sup> See Malinar, Angelika, *Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, Introduction and Ch. 1. This is the most complete evaluation of various hermeneutical traditions within *Bg* studies. I will use ‘holistic’ going forward. The author of the *Bg* presumes Kṛṣṇa to be the Supreme Being, therefore, I write from its presumption though I am a Christian.

<sup>11</sup> See Malinar, Angelika, *Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 24

world” manufactured to bridge the horizons of merging epochs. The *Mhbn* universe is an “idealized Bronze Age society,” a “heroic world” that lives poetically and harmoniously within a later age.<sup>12</sup> I do not mean, though, that the events are a-historical. The editor may have re-told the historical narrative from the perspective of “hypothetical,” “idealized” world. In the end, Fowler’s stance makes sense as the best way forward, or we may miss the forest for the trees. She writes, “In the absence of any conclusive evidence as to authorship, it seems to me best to treat the Gita as it stands, letting the text speak for itself, bearing in mind that for some it is a composite rather than [a] unitary text.”<sup>13</sup>

I position myself alongside J.A.B. van Buitenen and Angelika Malinar, both of whom value the contributions of higher critical scholarship while simultaneously understanding the holistic literary message in response to changing societal perceptions of war. In other words, the *Bg*’s origination from within the *Mhba* was a purposeful creation to address a transcendent problem, the “climax and solution [to] the dharma dilemma of a war.”<sup>14</sup> I add that its purpose is to prepare and restore *kṣatriyas* after combat. Malinar continues to quote van Buitenen, “the *Gītā* provides a unique religious and philosophical context in which it can be faced, recognized, and dealt with.”<sup>15</sup> The ‘it’ of which van Buitenen writes is the tragic reality between remaining true to *dharma* and the inherently evil nature of killing one’s kin/preceptor.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McGrath, Kevin, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Fowler, Jeaneane, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), xxvi.

<sup>14</sup> See Malinar, Angelika, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 29. Malinar is continuing to summarize van Buitenen.

<sup>15</sup> Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 29, cited from *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation*, J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981). I will later address the common references to the ethical/moral/spiritual wrongness of Arjuna’s command to kill his kin and preceptors (Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karna). If Kṛṣṇa sanctions the kill and reveals that he himself is the primary agent of killing, then the ethical/moral wrongness of the act is removed (*Bg* 11.33-34).

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps, van Buitenen’s quote betrays a western Jueo-Christian approach to war, for sanctioned warfare in the *Mhba* is welcomed and sought out. The implication of Kṛṣṇa’s kill-commands and the explanation of the causative agency removed the moral guilt from what seems to be immoral acts of killing.



Malinar builds off Minor’s observation that “It is extremely unfortunate that most of what is being written on the Gītā has been written before.”<sup>17</sup> He notes the lack of outside sources that would challenge the interpreter/commentator's personal views. My goal is to say something new about the *Bg*, but only because the way to “open up new perspectives” is the process of allowing the ancient background to play its contextual role. Jonathon Shay reflected upon allowing the *Iliad*’s ancient Greco combat context to speak to PTSD.

... I was struck by the similarity of their war experiences to Homer’s account of Achilles in the *Iliad*.... To my astonishment, I was told that knowledge would also flow in the opposite direction—that scholars and critics of the *Iliad* would be better able to interpret the great epic if they listened to combat soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

Shay’s reflection is the presumption of this project. The “similarity” of the contexts of ancient *kṣatriyas* and contemporary warriors invites a new two-way conversation.

### **Kevin McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā***

Kevin McGrath’s significant contribution, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, provides the most accessible, deeply exegetically grounded, and lucid portrayal of Arjuna, not to mention his other books on Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīṣma, Karna, Vyāsa, Kṛṣṇa.<sup>19</sup> One important point from his approach to understanding Arjuna is indispensable to this project. McGrath subtly places his retelling of Arjuna in the backdrop of the *dharm*-deficient *Kali Yuga* (age). This reality is an observation rarely mentioned in commentaries, and it reinforces why there was little good to come out of the battle

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<sup>17</sup> Malinar, Angelika, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 17, cited from Robert Minor’s article, ‘Religious Experience in Bhagavadgītā Eleven and the Text’s Interpretation,’ in *New Essays in the Bhagavadgītā: Philosophical, Methodological, and Cultural Approaches*, A. Sharma (New Delhi: Books & Books).

<sup>18</sup> Shay, Jonathon, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1995), xiii. See Ch.2.

<sup>19</sup> See McGrath, Kevin, *Bhīṣma Devavrata: Authority in Epic Mahābhārata* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2018); *Rāja Yudhiṣṭhira: Kingship in Epic Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); *Heroic Kṛṣṇa: Friendship in Epic Mahābhārata* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); *The Sanskrit Hero: Karna in Epic Mahābhārata* (Boston: Brill, 2004); *Vyāsa Redux: Narrative in Epic Mahābhārata* (Anthem Press: New York, 2019).

of Kurukṣetra. McGrath explains in a footnote, “all human attempts to behave, to think, or even to experience good emotions during this time are merely approximations towards what is right, they are all asymptotic endeavors.”<sup>20</sup> Borrowing from McGrath, an “asymptotic endeavor” is a *kṣatriya* who is struggling to move toward righteousness like an asymptotic line continually moving toward but never intersecting the curve. Applied to this project, it is the undistracted, indifferent, single-minded, Kṛṣṇa centered, *dharma*-dictated, caste-required performance.

The idea that performing righteous combat (*dharma-yuddha*) in the *Kali Yuga* is an asymptotic effort resonates with sources in ECTL. In his work on the *Iliad*, Jonathon Shay writes, “*Anything* in the form or substance of an account of combat trauma that offers the reader easy reassurance betrays the truth in veterans’ narratives and in the *Iliad*.”<sup>21</sup> Shay notes that the *Iliad* “ends with mourning, not reassurances.” By the time the *Mhbn* war ends, Yudhiṣṭhira is distraught by the horrendous cost of the war. He achieved his political goal but did not immediately enjoy his spoils of war (cf. Bg 18:78). Shay quotes Tim O’Brien at length from his book, *The Things They Carried*. It could have been describing Kurukṣetra. O’Brien writes,

A true war story is never moral. . . . If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever.<sup>22</sup>

As we will discover, re-reading the epic in its combat context reveals a hero that vacillates between duty and non-duty. Arjuna struggled to remain combat-ready, combat effective, and committed to his pre-war promise. Before the war, he wholeheartedly committed, or so he thought. However, at

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<sup>20</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 55. McGrath goes beyond the *bharata* conflict by explaining Arjuna’s origin and pre-embodied deeds while in his unique relationship as *dvau Kṛṣṇa* (“two Kṛṣṇas”) and *Naranārāyaṇau* (*Nara and Nārāyaṇa*).

<sup>21</sup> Emphasis Shay, Jonathon, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 183.

<sup>22</sup> O’Brien, Tim, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Viking Press, 1990), 76-77, cited from Shay, Jonathon, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 183, cited from

the commencement of the war, he had a complete *dharma* breakdown because of what he perceived would be the ultimate destruction of his kin. Yet, after the *Bg*, he declared himself ready to obey Kṛṣṇa's "words" (*matas*). Yet, as both armies prosecuted the war, he continued to flip and flop from *dharma* to *a-dharma*.

### **The *Bhagavadgītā* as A New Perspective in Emerging Combat Trauma Literature**

To date, there is a minimal contribution to furthering the understanding of nonphysical combat trauma from the dialogue of the *Bg* and the epic accounts of the *Mhba*. In a minor fashion, examples from psychology reference the epic, e.g., Jennifer Wortmann's (*et al.*) article, "Spiritual Features of War-Related Moral Injury: A Primer for Clinicians."<sup>23</sup> Wortmann and company identified a gap between mental health workers and religious persons (chaplains/theologians/pastors) when both work together to understand postcombat moral injury. The difficulty arises when clinicians address examples of moral guilt associated with a patient's spiritual/religious tradition. Mental health workers often do not fully grasp religious life and practice, nuanced theological categories, or in-depth knowledge of diverse religious traditions. Accordingly, writes Wortman, they are often ill-equipped to speak of a moral injury in the framework of the patient's religious belief system.<sup>24</sup>

They note examples of moral injury like anger, guilt, a sense of betrayal of leadership, self-betrayal, regret over having killed, and inability to prevent the deaths of others. In a general fashion, they respond with references to the *Bg*, the *Mhba*, the *Law Code of Manu*, and the

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<sup>23</sup> Wortmann, J, E. Eisen, C. Hundert, A. Jordan, M. Smith, W. Nash, B. Litz, "Spiritual Features of War-Related Moral Injury," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 4, no. 4 (2017): 249-261, <https://doi: 10.1037/scp0000140>. Access August 2021.

<sup>24</sup> The term 'moral injury' was coined by Jonathon Shay in *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay defines it in the context of Homer's *Iliad* as the violation of what one knows to be true of reality, i.e., one's moral compass (*thumis*). See Ch. 2.3ff.

*Upaniṣhads* as several sacred sources for understanding and healing moral injury. They also distinguish between “objective guilt” and “guilt-feelings.” The former is determined by a patient’s moral code as stated in a sacred source (e.g., the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount). The latter may or may not be present.<sup>25</sup> Mental health workers who do not “appreciate” a patient’s moral code (based on a sacred text and religious tradition) may misdiagnose or fail to understand a patient’s underlying issue. Mental health and pastoral workers will benefit from collaboration, but there is scarcely published scholarship on Hindu sources that offer more than general references. Hence, there is a gap between Hindu Studies and ECTL.

### **The *Bhagavadgītā* Beyond fields of Military Science and Trauma Related Studies**

The gap does not imply that scholars are *not* reading and applying the ancient Indian epic to illuminate contemporary situations. On the contrary, there are numerous examples of books, journal articles, and blogs using the lessons of the *Bg* and the *Mhba* in leadership studies. For instance, in *Bhagavad Gita on Effective Leadership: Timeless Wisdom for Leaders*, Puja Roka begins with Arjuna’s moment of crisis between the two armies and then works to fill the gap between Hindu Studies and modern scholarship on leadership and management.<sup>26</sup> Roka combines spiritual and meta-principles (vision, identity, integrity), thus merging multiple disciplines for one purpose (Hindu Studies, Philosophy, Theology, Leadership, Management). In another example, *Timeless Leadership: 18 Leadership Sutras from The Bhagavad Gita*, Debashis Chatterjee challenges modern leaders to focus on their personal development because a leader cannot effectively lead others without correctly understanding who they are and the nature of the world

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<sup>25</sup> The distinction between “objective guilt” and “guilt-feelings” is vividly portrayed by Arjuna and his older brother, Yudhiṣṭhira (see Chs. 8, 9). Yudhiṣṭhira feels guilty, but he is not objectively guilty.

<sup>26</sup> Roka, Puja, *Bhagavad Gita on Effective Leadership: Timeless Wisdom for Leaders* (New York: IUniverse, Inc., 2006).

around them.<sup>27</sup> Finally, in an example from business analysts, Charles Chow Hoi Hee and Bruce Gurd combine two ancient combat contexts for modern insight. In “Leadership Essentials from Sun Zi’s Art of War and The Bhagavad Gita,” Hee and Gurd examine complementary leadership traits found in both sources concluding that both have much to offer and further research is warranted.<sup>28</sup>

In another example from feminist studies, Gayathri and Meenakshi touch on the combat context of Arjuna’s despondency but then quickly move toward teasing out evidence of “emotional intelligence,”<sup>29</sup> a psychological construct three millennia removed from its place and time. In *Caring to Know: comparative ethics, feminist epistemology, and the Bhagavadgītā*, Vrinda Dalmiya finds a footing in the *Mhba* because of its wellspring of characters, scenarios, and recorded actions.<sup>30</sup> Prema Ramachandran and Rachna Sharma’s article, “Are you a Kaurava or a Pāṇḍavā at work: management lessons from the Mahabharata,” articulates a dozen leadership/management principles comparing the actions of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.<sup>31</sup> Prasad L. Kaipa’s article, “Making wise decisions: leadership lessons from the Mahabharata,” is thematically consistent with the combat context, for the *Mhba* repeatedly emphasizes the tragic consequences of Duryodhana’s wicked disregard for counsel.<sup>32</sup> Yet, such contributions make a

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<sup>27</sup> Chatterjee, Debashi, *Timeless Leadership: 18 Leadership Sutras from The Bhagavad Gita* (Hoboken: Wiley India, PVT. LTD., 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Chow Hoi Hee, Charles, and Bruce Gurd, “Leadership Essentials from Sun Zi’s Art of War and The Bhagavad Gita,” *Journal of Management History*, no. 3 (2010): 396-414.

<sup>29</sup> Gayathri, N., K. Meenakshi, “Emotional Intelligence in the Indian Context,” *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, no. 8 (2013): 154-156.

<sup>30</sup> Dalmiya, Vrinda, *Caring to Know: comparative care ethics, feminist epistemology, and the Mahabharata* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016): DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199464760.0001. Access August 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Ramachandran, Prema and Rachna Sharma. “Are you a Kaurava or a Pāṇḍavā at work: management lessons from the Mahabharata.” *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 7, no 2 (2013):55-69, <https://birmingham-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore>

<sup>32</sup> The universal disdain and ignorance of wicked Duryodhana is so prevalent his father is urged to disown him as a son.

minor contribution to ECTL. However, there is one significant comparative work based on sacred texts. I turn now to Joseph McDonald.

**Joseph McDonald, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts***

Scholars outside Hindu Studies have provided text-based studies, e.g., Joseph McDonald's, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*. McDonald's edited work addresses nonphysical combat trauma research from the perspectives of multiple sacred texts. By expanding theological sources, the contributors advance the discipline down the field of scholarship by opening the possibilities for discovery and application. His work is a watershed contribution that includes examples from the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament), the Gospel of Mark, the Qur'an, civil religion, culture, and Buddhist scriptures. His approach is unique because it expands emerging research by increasing the breadth of sources/contexts beyond predominantly western Christian worldviews.

*Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts* is an example of the increasing academic interest in postcombat trauma, specifically, the topic of moral injury. However, McDonald does not include a reading from Hindu Studies, specifically, the *Bg* and the *Mhba*. Despite the conspicuous omission, his effort in expanding the context expands perspectives making this contribution significant to this project and future research. Others are making contributions on a pop-cultural level. For example, Tony Camerino relates Buddhism to the impact of his active duty in the United States Airforce (criminal investigations & counterintelligence interrogations).<sup>33</sup> His chapter, "What Buddhism Can Teach Us about Moral Injury," is emotionally provocative. Yet, it does not go beyond general themes, e.g., the 'Middle Way,' the cyclical nature of time and the universe, mental disciplines, and the balance of the 'Ying and the Yang.' Moreover, Camerino is a combat

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<sup>33</sup> Camerino, Tony, "What Buddhism Can Teach Us about Moral Injury," cited from Meagher, Robert Emmet, Pryer, Douglas A, *War and Moral Injury* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 74-78.

veteran relaying his spiritual journey, and his memoir is not theologically shallow because he is not a credentialed theologian.

On the contrary, his story joins the increasing interest in connecting theological concepts to ECTL. Returning to the *Mhba*, the epic meets a significant general gap in ECTL because it is profoundly theological while taking place in the context of a war. Specifically, it gives the accounts of the application of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching to Arjuna’s nonphysical combat trauma and how he was “corrected” and prepared to fulfill his *dharma*-dictated, caste-required, combat-duty (*dharma-yuddha*; cf. *Bg* 3.1, 8). Like no other text, its expressed purpose is to be the means of returning to war. Doing so becomes a spiritual, psychological, and practical preparation for killing *and* recovering in and after combat. Thus, re-reading the *Bg* in its *Mhbn* combat context in the *Kali Yuga* will illuminate a new perspective on nonphysical combat trauma.<sup>34</sup>

## Context, Crisis, and Issues

### ***Kurukṣetra*: The Culmination of a Crisis**

Did Arjuna’s crisis begin precisely at the moment he saw Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons deployed in their battle formations (*vyavasthitān dr̥ṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān*, *Bg* 1.20)? Did it start when he saw his enemies in familial relationships (*Bg* 1.26-27) or “after seeing them” [collectively] as “my own people” (*dr̥ṣṭvemam svajanam*, *Bg* 1.28)?<sup>35</sup> Or was his crisis the culmination of the swell of the *guṇas* assaulting his ability to rightly perceive the nature of combat and then reason his next move per his personal, righteous, *kṣatriya* duty (*svadharmayuddha*)? I opt for the latter, and I understand

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<sup>34</sup> See Chs. 6, 7. It is also extremely relevant to the issue of ‘moral injury,’ but while that phenomena is the focus of many scholars, this project focuses on ontological/theological language pertaining to the soul.

<sup>35</sup> *imam* is acc. sg specifically identifying *svajanam* as his extended family (the Kurus) or the entire force as “this my family.” Bibek Debroy argues the former. See the introduction of Bibek Debroy, trans., *The bhagavad gita* (Haryana, India: Penguin Books, 2019), x.

his crisis began before the “clashing of weapons” (*pravṛtte śāstrasampāte*, *Bg* 1.20). Thus, his crisis is an episode in a continuum of events proceeding from the *Udyoga Parvan*.

The established doctrine of the *guṇas* within the material nature of humanity cannot be overstated (*Bg* 13.19; 18.19).<sup>36</sup> Known generally as truth, passion, and darkness, they are the source of caste-combat actions (*karma*) performed in war (*ghora*, *Bg* 3.5, 3.27; 18.29, 41).<sup>37</sup> In the eternal cycle of universal re-creation, Kṛṣṇa saturates the material world with the presence of these elements. In turn, he created the four-tiered caste system aligning with the density of respective *guṇas* and their corresponding *karma* (*Bg* 4.13). According to the *Santi Parvan*, the *guṇas* come into existence within material nature and are destroyed at the universe's destruction. The *guṇas* appear and return to their source (the creator) like the ocean's tides.<sup>38</sup> When in the moment of battle, *kṣatriyas* fight one another as the *guṇas* war within. Soon, their blood is up as the *guṇas* swell (*rajas*, *tamas*), and compulsion toward passion-based and *a-dharma* action increases. In *Bg* 3.41, 43, like material enemies, Kṛṣṇa commands Arjuna to “kill” the “demon” which are the *guṇas* that “destroys knowledge and discrimination” (v41).<sup>39</sup> He is to “kill the enemy,” which manifests as “desire” and is a “very formidable opponent” (v43).<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the formidability of the *guṇas* proved too much for Arjuna in the famous opening scene.

The swelling tide of the *guṇas* impacts the character of King Yudhiṣṭhira. In the *Udyoga Parvan*, Yudhiṣṭhira's initial conclusion was, “Therefore, I desire to see peace and no Kuru

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<sup>36</sup> I translate the locative compound *guṇasamkhyāne* as “established doctrine.” It is the collected knowledge (both *śruti* and *smṛti*) in reference to prior debates and sacred texts. Kṛṣṇa's first response to Arjuna's crisis rooted in his *rajas* and *tamas* attachment is a reference to the limitations of the comprehensive teaching in the *Vedas* (*Bg* 2.45).

<sup>37</sup> They are the source of all actions in the universe.

<sup>38</sup> Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata, Santi Parvan*, CCLII. See free online source: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/index.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> “demon” (*pāpmānam*); “destroying knowledge and discrimination” (*jñānavijñānanāśanam*).

<sup>40</sup> I provide a more figurative translation based on the combat-context as opposed to a more literal translation of *durāsadam*, “difficult to encounter.”



injured” (*akṣatān kurupāñcālān paśyema iti kāmāye*). Yet, he was ready for peace or war (*yuddhāya*).<sup>41</sup> However, his resolve for war fades as the inescapability of conflict increasingly looms over the horizon. Malinar details his angst and the unmistakable *dharma*-dictated, caste-required responsibilities.

On the one hand, Yudhiṣṭhira must perform his *kṣatriya* duty, or he is a shameful emasculate eunuch of a man. But on the other hand, family caste law (*kula-dharma*) means killing one’s kin is a heinous act. Thus, his inner *guṇa-karma* means of perception and reason are at an impasse. Despite wanting peace, peace becomes impossible. The wicked culprit, Duryodhana, remains obstinate and inflexible toward compromise, guaranteeing that both clans must commit familicide.

Regarding Arjuna’s *dharma*, he becomes distraught. As the scene in *Ugyoga Parvan* 5.132, 36-38 ends, the *kṣatriya* queen describes in a speech the essence or “heart” of what it means to be a *kṣatriya* (*kṣatrahṛdayam*).<sup>42</sup> Arjuna is to remain unrelenting and devoid of his well-being. He is to fight or die fighting. Later, Duryodhana echoes the same message to justify his insistence on war. Malinar translates the *ślokas*, “He must stand erect. Never must he submit. Manliness means steadfastness! Even if he feels like (inwardly) falling apart, he should never here on earth bow to anybody ...” (*pauruṣam*).<sup>43</sup> Arjuna will face similar conflicted emotions in the face of killing his kin (see *Bg* 1.44; 2.5),<sup>44</sup> but he allows it to manifest itself as “base weakness of heart” (*kṣudram hṛdayadaurbalyam*, see *Bg* 2.3). In other words, a fundamental inability to prosecute the war has supplanted his core awareness that he was re-born for this very purpose.

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<sup>41</sup> Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata, Udyoga Parvan*, 31.23. Cf. *Bg* 2.37 where Arjuna is commanded to be “resolved to battle” (*yuddhāya kṛtaniścayas*).

<sup>42</sup> *hṛdaya* means “heart.” See Malinar, 40. Malinar renders it “essence of a hero.”

<sup>43</sup> Malinar, Angelika, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> See *Bg* 1.44, the “destruction of family laws” (*utsannakuladharmāñām*).

I make the following three points. First, Arjuna similarly struggled in *Bg* 1 as Yudhiṣṭhira suffered before the war because this was not the first time he had considered the ultimate consequences of killing his kin. He was present in Yudhiṣṭhira’s court. They heard the same insults and admonishments toward battle. Secondly, though Vidurā’s command employs a different word for “He must stand erect. He must never submit,” it is strikingly similar to Kṛṣṇa’s command to Arjuna, “stand up” (*uttiṣṭha*) “having abandoned base weakness of the heart.”<sup>45</sup> Arjuna is not cowering to his enemies before him; Arjuna is succumbing to his enemies within him. Thirdly, like Yudhiṣṭhira, he is expected to fulfill his duty no matter how difficult, even if he feels like he is falling apart “in his spirit/soul” (*pauruṣam*).<sup>46</sup> As will be seen, it is the assault upon his *guṇa-karma* epistemology, the trauma from the *guṇas* to his perception of the reality of combat, that will be the focus of Kṛṣṇa’s restoration and command to stand (see Ch. 6-8).

I suggest that the more we see Arjuna’s episode as a shocking, unexpected response, the more the *Bg* appears as an unnecessary distraction and interruption of the epic’s narrative. In contrast, a better option may be to treat his crisis as it stands following the extreme emotions of the failed diplomatic envoys. Doing so sets up *Bg* 1-2 as a continuation of the previous book, not just as a prelude to the war. The origin of Arjuna’s scene of intense *guṇa*-driven *karma* (action) is not the *Bg*. Rather, it happened in Yudhiṣṭhira’s court when the Pāṇḍavā leadership made vows after having been thoroughly insulted by Duryodhana.

Rather than assuming the *Bg* as the beginning of his crisis, the 700 śloka of the “sacred dialogue” (*dharmyaṃ saṃvādam*, *Bg* 18.70) would have been an hour or so of respite with his attentive, loving, grace-filled ‘Supreme Deity.’ In contrast to the tranquility of Kṛṣṇa’s presence,

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<sup>45</sup> See *Bg* 2.3, *kṣudraṃ hṛdayadaurbalyaṃ tyaktvottiṣṭha*. The gerund *tyaktva* from √*tyaj* implies that Arjuna must stand up only *after* he “abandons base weakness of heart.” See also Ch. 8.

<sup>46</sup> *pauruṣam* is in the acc. His ‘heart’ is the location of his distress.

the battlefield encompassing his chariot was gradually morphing into hell on earth. Considering the *Bg* in the combat context of the *Mhba*, the *Bg* was the end, not the beginning, of just one of many *guṇic* swings from a reluctance to fight to a commitment to kill in the *Udyoga Parvan*. His episode at the dawn of Kurukṣetra is the culmination of a downward *guṇic* path. He will recover, but he will eventually repeat aspects of his crisis again and again in the books chronicling the war.

### ***Kurukṣetra: Issue of ‘Soul Wound’***

I have suggested that Arjuna’s episode at the dawn of Kurukṣetra culminated in a downward *guṇa-karma* spiral. Arjuna (like any *kṣatriya*) must fulfill his caste duty regardless of how he may feel ‘inside.’ Ultimately, he was confused, for he later declared himself free from “confusion” (*moham*, *Bg* 11.1). In response to Kṛṣṇa’s summative question, “has your ignorant confusion been destroyed” (*Bg* 18.72), Arjuna responded that “confusion has been destroyed,” “on account of [Kṛṣṇa’s] grace” (*Bg* 18.73). His “ignorant confusion” (*a-jñānasaṃ-mohas*, *Bg* 18.72) was the direct result of the swell and domination of the *guṇas* of passion (*rajas*) and ignorant-darkness (*tamas*). His actions (*karma*) aligned with his response. Had he responded to the *guṇas* of truth (*sattva*), he would have advanced to complete his duty. Unfortunately, he succumbed to his emotions (*rajas*), swept away by intense passions and [temporary] confusion (*tamas*).

Despite the unabated onslaught of the *guṇas* besieging Arjuna’s ability to perceive and reason, Kṛṣṇa’s teaching will soon enable him to make his next move on the battlefield *per* truth (*sattva*) *despite* how he felt inside his ‘heart.’ That is, at the least, the image we find in his final declaration (*Bg* 18.73). Vidurā’s (and Duryodhana’s) earlier statement implies that the common nonphysical postcombat traumas wreaked havoc on *how* Arjuna perceived and reasoned. But, when we transition from the *Udyoga Parvan* to the *Bg*, Kṛṣṇa teaches that those traumas are not

in the metaphorical ‘heart.’ Therefore, postcombat trauma at Kurukṣetra may present itself as a wound to the core of a human being, but the *Bg* teaches otherwise. The *hrdya* (“heart”) in the *Bg* is synonymous with the *ātman*, and the *ātman* is immutable and eternal. The traumas of war are temporary, but they are so powerful that they may cause *kṣatriyas* to refuse to execute their duty, commit *a-dharma* acts, reject their caste, or alter their destiny. For example, Kṛṣṇa teaches in *Bg* 2.47 that Arjuna must fight because [combat] action (*karma*) is *evādhikāras*, “your jurisdiction alone” (Tsoukalas, Sargeant).<sup>47</sup> Yogananda’s translation, “thy human right,” misses the combat context by overgeneralizing *evādhikāras* to humanity.<sup>48</sup> *Evādhikāras* is the specific dominion of a *kṣatriya*. Kṛṣṇa explains that Arjuna possesses the influence to control himself and his ability to fight as one who is not attached to the consequences of combat.. The one thing he must never do (because of his *kṣatriya* status) is to reject his caste-dictated, *dharma*-determined combat because of his “attachment” (*saṅgosti*) to “non-action” (*akarmani*). He must “never become attached to non-action.”<sup>49</sup>

I understand the impact of the rise and fall of the *guṇas* very similarly to the process John P. Wilson described in *The Posttraumatic Self*. Wilson explains how the act of combat assaults the interior dimension of the ‘self.’ Throughout the thesis, I will refer to Wilson’s description because it emphasizes a warrior’s faculties of perception, reason, and experience, the epistemological dimension of life. While he does use the term ‘self,’ he does not describe it in the words of a ‘wound to the soul,’ a ‘damaged soul,’ a ‘split’ or ‘shattered soul.’ These can be empty terms and ambiguous words approximating what a warrior feels ‘inside.’ Wilson writes,

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<sup>47</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 223. Tsoukalas notes this is the beginning of teaching on Kṛṣṇa karma yoga; Sargeant, *Bhagavad Gītā*, 132. Fowler translation is too wooden, thus awkward to read, “In action only you are right,” see *The Bhagavad Gita*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Yogananda, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, 281.

<sup>49</sup> *saṅgo ’stv akarmani*. My translation. *saṅgo ’stv* is m.n.sg., *Bg* 2.47.

The identity of the posttraumatic self reflects alterations and reconfigurations of its inner structural dimensions and the psychological process they govern. The architecture of the self is altered by trauma and, in extreme cases, the entire infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented with a new design. The survivor faces the reality of how emotionally infused traumatic exposure has altered their sense of well-being, values, and views of life.<sup>50</sup>

Wilson’s description describes trauma as so powerful, disruptive, and fundamentally destructive that a warrior will require an entire reconstruction of how they perceive what they know to be true of reality. For a *kṣatriya* like Arjuna, he was required to stand, fight, and kill despite sensing his “entire infrastructure” suddenly deconstructed. The mere expectation of *karmanīghora* produced nonphysical combat trauma that “altered” his “sense of well-being, values, and views of life.” Revisiting Vidurā’s (Duryodhana’s) statement above, *karmanīghora* could make a *kṣatriya* feel like his heart was wounded, but that does not mean *karmanīghora* hurt his heart or soul (*ātman*).

The *Bg*’s (*Mhba*’s) perspective contrasts the emerging research in nonphysical combat trauma (ECTL), but they share contextual considerations. In *Care for the Sorrowing Soul*, theologian Duane Larson and combat veteran Jeff Zust address the ontological question, “What is it that is injured when we speak of moral injury?” After a lengthy discourse on western theological and philosophical sources that have formed our understanding of the human conscience, they examine the inadequacy of Greek Stoicism to prevent moral injury in the “military psyche” (conscience). Adopting the increasingly popular position of a “social construction of conscience,” they explain that the self is formed and shaped by all dimensions of life. The self/conscience is “... braided. And it is vulnerable to fraying.”<sup>51</sup> Humanity is “braided,” interconnected, and meant to be in a community. Modern combat (*karmanīghora*) frays and

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<sup>50</sup> Wilson, John P., ed., *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>51</sup> Larson, Duane, Jeff Zust, *Care for the Sorrowing Soul: Healing Moral Injuries from Military Service and Implications for the Rest of Us* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 101, 111.

destroys our connections with people, places, and things. With that in mind, I suggest Arjuna’s described trauma to the “architecture” of his “self.”<sup>52</sup> Metaphorically speaking, his world was falling apart all around him, or, more precisely, the moral foundation of his warrior code. Therefore, I view Kṛṣṇa’s restorative, *guṇa-karma* epistemology as a reconstruction of Arjuna’s perception of reality. *Karmaṇighora*, “violent, gory [combat] action,” is caused by the *guṇas*, be they sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic. In turn, those actions (*karma*) feed and bolster the *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which cause profound pain and internal suffering. The *Bg* addresses what Wilson describes as “changes in the inner world of experience following trauma.”<sup>53</sup>

### Contribution and Thesis

From within Hindu Studies, Herman Tieken, in his article, “Kill and be killed: The Bhagavadgita and the Anugita,” compares how Kṛṣṇa’s teaching differs in these two conversations. While the intention of the former was to help Arjuna avoid guilt in the upcoming battle, the latter and briefer discussion (*Anugita*) removed the feelings of guilt *after* the war.<sup>54</sup> Nonphysical wounds like anger, grief, regret, and self-reproach are the most common responses to prolonged combat. Tieken’s reading of *The Anugita* is beyond the scope of my endeavor. Yet, it is an example that other Hindu scholars have engaged in comparative studies for understanding phenomenology related to the combat context of the *Bg*.

Closer still is Scott Dunbar, who compared the ethical implications of a *kṣatriya*’s “righteous battle” (*dharma yuddha*) to the more traditional (also comparative) *jus bellum* thesis of

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<sup>52</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Tieken, Herman, “Kill and be Killed: The Bhagavadgītā and Anugītā in the Mahābhārata,” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 2 (November 2009): 209–228, DOI:10.1093/JHS/HIP011. Access August 2021.

Michael Walzer.<sup>55</sup> *Jus bellum* also falls just beyond the parameters of this project, but Dunbar's approach is relevant. In his critique of Walzer's broadly applied theory that has become a universal standard, Dunbar worked toward filling the gap in the Just War Theory of the lack of contributions from Asian military (non-western) traditions. The *Mhba*'s narration of the battle of Kurukṣetra plays a lesser role in Dunbar's thesis. However, he challenges Walzer's theory by demonstrating how an ancient Hindu sacred text may illuminate contemporary issues.<sup>56</sup>

In his recent work, *The Bible and Moral Injury*, Brad Kelle's approach provides a precedent for re-reading an ancient sacred text so that it may "open up a new perspective" in ECTL. Kelle's hermeneutic of "creative readings" of biblical narratives has illuminated potential case studies of moral injuries. He notes the "commonly expressed need" for "broader methodological input and greater methodological precision."<sup>57</sup> Kelle's primary example is King Saul, presenting the dubious king as a possible case study by *re-reading* how traumatic events in the early years of his reign may have partly fostered the tragic events leading to his demise. Kelle positions himself in the same hermeneutical commitment as Shay and other scholars, chaplains, and clinicians who have re-read Greek classics for potential insight into moral injury (e.g., *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Achilles, Odysseus, Hector).<sup>58</sup> However, Kelle sets a significantly deeper exegetical precedent in his "two-way interpretation" of the Old Testament.<sup>59</sup> Kelle's work represents a growing trend to fill a gap

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<sup>55</sup> Dunbar, Scott, "Classical Hindu Views of 'Righteous Warfare' (*dharma Yuddha*) in Light of Michael Walzer's *Just War Theory*." (PhD diss., University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, 2011). <https://harvest.usask.ca/handle/10388/ETD-2011-07-28>.

<sup>56</sup> Dunbar, *Classical Hindu Views of 'Righteous Warfare' (dharma Yuddha) in Light of Michael Walzer's Just War Theory*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Kelle, Brad, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture alongside War's Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 11, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury*, 63-64. An additional important aspect is the inclusion of post-war rites-of-passage (see Ch. 4). See Chaplain David L. Bachelor's *Sacraments of War: The Sword and the Warrior Wash* (self-published). Kelle is a veteran and formally trained biblical scholar. I do not infer that all informal 'lay' work is not exegetically and theologically astute. Shay's work as a psychiatrist rereading *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* is highly exegetical and makes use of the original language.

in Biblical Studies by allowing the *Bible* to become a new perspective for insight into moral injury. In doing so, the moral injury becomes a lens for a fresh understanding of the *Bible*. In the same spirit, I work toward filling a gap in Hindu Studies. In doing so, those accounts become a lens for a fresh understanding of the *Bg*.

ECTL (as a whole) agrees that there is no *completely* adequate preparation for the nonphysical traumas of killing. One cannot go to war and return unchanged. One cannot kill and escape the nonphysical trauma of combat. Shay observed, “Prolonged contact with the enemy in war destroys the soldier’s confidence in his own mental functions ...”<sup>60</sup> However, the *Bg* presents a stark contrast. Kṛṣṇa emphatically affirms that his *matīs* (*conviction, belief*) is sufficient preparation for combat's violent and gory business. His *śādhi* (correction) is the exclusive means of restoration from cumulative nonphysical traumas associated with the everyday tasks of war (*karmanīghora*).

There is little extensive, systematic literature addressing nonphysical, postcombat trauma in the *Bg* and the *Mhba*. Neither is there a perspective in ECTL from Hindu Studies, specifically, the *Bg* in the *Mhba*. Therefore, my focus is on Kṛṣṇa’s ontologically substantiated, *guṇa-karma* epistemological means of restoration and preparation for and after *karmanīghora*. More specifically, I frame Kṛṣṇa’s teaching according to four primary imperatives: *paśya* (“see”), *titikṣasva* (“patiently endure”), *viddhi* (“know”), and *uttiṣṭha* (“stand up”). Though numerous accounts in the *Mhba* suggest moral injuries and soul wounds, this project pertains to the phenomenon described in ECTL as a soul wound, soul injury, invisible wound, or nonphysical trauma.

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<sup>60</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 34.



Over the upcoming 18 days, Arjuna will vacillate from order (*dharma*) to disorder (*a-dharma*), from combat readiness and effectiveness to combat ineffectiveness. However, he is not alone. What makes Arjuna different is that he again and again hears and responds to a verbal correction or appeal, be it a rebuke from his brother, Bhīma, or the kind words of his beloved friend and lord, Kṛṣṇa.<sup>61</sup> He may not be an ideal example, but he is a consistent model.

Having ridden the swelling tides of the *guṇas* of passion that have culminated in his *a-dharma* crisis, Arjuna assumed the role of a devotee, strongly requesting that Kṛṣṇa “correct” or “order” him (*śādhi*, Bg 2.7).<sup>62</sup> The thesis is this: *In the Bg, Kṛṣṇa fully re-ordered Arjuna from a state of guṇa-karma epistemological disorder (combat ineffectiveness) to a state of combat readiness which prepared him for combat effectiveness, the gruesome work of a kṣatriya. Yet, Kṛṣṇa’s śādhi did not insulate Arjuna from the negative impact of “violent, gory combat” (karmanīghora).* Thus, the *Mhba* portrays Arjuna struggling to maintain a state of combat readiness, swaying back and forth from disorder to readiness, from ineffectiveness to effectiveness, from indecision to a total commitment to fight and fulfill his pre-war *dharma* commitment.

## Synopsis

Chapter 1: *Bridging Horizons and Methodological Challenges*. As the title suggests, there are methodological challenges to reading an ancient, sacred, foundational text outside one’s religious tradition, much less gaining perspective on a serious contemporary issue. Catherine Cornille identified two challenges in *Song Divine*, noting an outsider’s “hermeneutical privilege”

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<sup>61</sup> I repeat the phrase ‘again and again’ throughout the epic as a reference to Sañjaya’s epilogue, i.e., “again and again I rejoice,” (*hr̥ṣyāmi ca muhur muhuḥ*). See Ch.1.3.3. Sañjaya is the ideal example of how to respond to Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*. When the phrase is used, it is meant to connect Arjuna’s positive movement toward the ideal.

<sup>62</sup> However, other characters will also provide the same message (*śādhi*). See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 1068. The term, *śādhi*, is the imperative active form of the verb √śās, and I use it to represent Kṛṣṇa’s response to Arjuna.

to interpret another tradition's sacred text. Secondly, Cornille reflected on the "religious status" of multiple sacred texts that define reality for their respective religious traditions.<sup>63</sup> Cornille comments,

Though Christians might not approach the *Bhagavad Gītā* with the same degree of devotion and reverence as they would their own scriptures, the text may still be regarded as a genuine *Song Divine*, as a source of revelation which may come to inspire and enrich the Christian tradition, perhaps even awakening it to insights hitherto unsuspected.<sup>64</sup>

In this Chapter, I navigate the challenge of "hermeneutical privilege" and "religious status" by borrowing from Anthony Thiselton in *Two Horizons*. The ancient text and the contemporary issue present 'horizons,' for example, a vast difference of time, a language barrier, theological distinctions, or in this case, connecting Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the *Bg*'s combat context with contemporary accounts of nonphysical postcombat trauma. The goal of the comparative theologian is to "bridge" those two horizons through a "fusion of ideas" (see Ch 1.1).<sup>65</sup> I address five horizons (challenges): comparative theology, phenomenology, text and commentary, historicity, and ontology. While I do not intend these former examples to be an exhaustive exposition and critique, I consider them significant considerations when one approaches the ancient Hindu text, any text outside one's tradition, and a means of "awakening" ECTL to "insights hitherto unsuspected."<sup>66</sup>

## Chapter 2: *Critical Reading of Emerging Combat Trauma Literature and 'Soul Wound.'* In

this chapter, I examine the emergence and evolution of a growing field of study focused on a type

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<sup>63</sup> Cornille, Catherine, ed., *Song Divine: Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā* (Paris: W.B. Eerdmans, 2006), 4. Cornille's context is Christian commentary on the *Bg*.

<sup>64</sup> Cornille, *Song Divine*, 5. Though I cannot deny the inherent literary beauty of the song, the enormity of the serious questions it skillfully tackles, and a growing academic fondness of the *Bg*, I stop short of treating it as a "genuine," divine "source of revelation." But, that does not prevent me from respecting its theological and philosophical significance. Cornille is not arguing for a Christian to view other sacred texts with equal status. She is implying there could be genuine revelation and truth.

<sup>65</sup> Fusion is a synthesis, for example, when a contemporary warrior finds a common theme in Arjuna's experience.

<sup>66</sup> Cornille, *Song Divine*, 5.

of nonphysical, psycho-emotional-spiritual, postcombat trauma. In the past, the psychological construct of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) dominated research, literature, and therapy. However, over the past thirty years, a new conversation emerged which recognizes PTSD *and* a type of nonphysical wound that the PTSD paradigm cannot adequately explain. The term moral injury grew in popularity since Jonathon Shay put the concept on the map in *Achilles in Vietnam*. It has since become associated with related terms like soul wound, spiritual injury, invisible injury, and nonphysical wound. However, as ECTL continues to expand, it is becoming apparent that there is no clear definition of moral injury *or* soul wound. Tom Frame wrote in his introduction of *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism*,

An uninformed reader would be excused for thinking that the concept is undisputed; its meaning uncontested; and that the research underpinning moral injury is unproblematic. Moral injury is, however, still a relatively new and largely unexplored term. In the extant literature, moral injury appears to be a phrase lacking precision, a concept looking for consensus and a notion seeking a parent discipline. At the moment, it appears to be a foster child still hoping that someone will call it their own and give it a name that fits its face.<sup>67</sup>

A reader may be “uninformed” because ECTL is an emerging field and moral injury is a “largely unexplored term.” I add to Frame’s observation that scholars write *as if* the concept of moral injury is “undisputed,” “uncontested,” and “unproblematic.”<sup>68</sup> Frame touches on the lack of clarity and precision in ECTL and the recognized gap of a “concept looking for consensus.” There is no canonization of terms and definitions, and I suggest this is the case because there is no voice from a dominant theological tradition. However, with the recent publications of Joseph McDonald’s *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts* and Brad Kelle’s *The Bible and Moral Injury*, ECTL is now moving in a tangential direction by re-reading sacred theological text.

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<sup>67</sup> Frame, Tom, ed., *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>68</sup> ECTL is largely presented in the indicative, not the subjunctive mood.

In addition, Tom Frame observes that our “therapeutic” society has conditioned us to group any nonphysical wound into psychological categories. We want to medicate it or psychoanalyze it, or both. Frame warns against this trend in ECTL, writing, “to ignore historians and philosophers, theologians and sociologists is to destine one’s conclusion to partiality.”<sup>69</sup> Honest ignorance certainly will “destine” one’s hard-earned work to “partiality,” however, Frame’s statement also implies a conscious approach to ignore “outsiders” (e.g., historians, philosophers, theologians, sociologists). Doing so may result in a partial answer to questions like the one that drives this thesis or the question at the very heart of ECTL: Why are so many combat veterans committing suicide? Moreover, ignoring new voices may “impoverish” future contributions to ECTL.<sup>70</sup>

The move toward non-psychological constructs has led to notable books, e.g., Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini’s *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury* and Larry Kent Graham’s *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls*. Ironically, both titles illustrate one of my chief critiques of ECTL: using moral injury and soul wound interchangeably creates ambiguity because they may not be synonymous and that soulish ambiguity drives the interchangeable use of both terms. I am not demeaning their work but restating what is already well known. Moral injury and soul wound remain “concepts seeking consensus.”<sup>71</sup> I close this chapter by examining the ambiguity of ‘soul talk’ in ECTL. Re-reading sacred texts will address the ambiguity within the discipline. If we are going to answer Brock and Lettini’s question from the perspective of the epic, we must know what we are comparing. I suggest the epic may be the best available option.

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<sup>69</sup> Frame, Tom, ed., *Moral Injury*, 9.

<sup>70</sup> By using “impoverish,” I am recalling J. A. B. van Buitenen’s statement that an overly critical or overly symbolic hermeneutic would “impoverish the text” of the *Mhba*. Ignoring other perspectives makes the text say less than it actually does by sapping the strength of its message.

<sup>71</sup> See quote above, Frame, *Moral Injury*, 9.

Chapter 3: *A Critical Reading of Selected Hindu Commentators*. In this chapter, I examine translations and commentaries that have dominated Hindu Studies. In doing so, I contrast my approach of reading the *Bg* in its *Mhbn* combat context with two categorizations: symbolic (symbolic with tension) and political. The symbolic camp has very little use of the historical context. Yet, some commentators tilt toward such an interpretation but still acknowledge the importance of the historical combat context. I refer to the latter as symbolic *with* tension. In addition, one finds a political hermeneutic embraced by 20<sup>th</sup>-century Indian nationalist movements.<sup>72</sup>

For example, Andrew Harvey locates the real Kurukṣetra as a battlefield “always taking place within the heart and soul of every human being.”<sup>73</sup> He encourages one to “forget all the academic and religious arguments” if one hopes to “open” the “doors of Gita’s splendor.”<sup>74</sup> He believes the “full truth” is a “permanently radical fusion of all the traditional Hindu approaches.”<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, the *Bg* is a universalized Hindu perspective of the ideal “human-divine agency.” This

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<sup>72</sup> In addition but not included in this project, some traditions and commentators like Prabhupāda emphasized the necessity of direct disciplic succession as the medium by which Kṛṣṇa conveys the transcendent truth which in turn minimizes the number of alternative voices. For example, he writes, “many less intelligent persons” read the text as a mere conversation between friends, implying that such a purpose precludes the *Bg* to be scripture (*śruti*). Likewise, the ignorant readers “protest” that Kṛṣṇa “incites” Arjuna to combat. See Swami Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad Gītā As It Is* (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2010). The Madhvan tradition has a long history of safeguarding Madhva’s teaching from outsiders. It is not dismissal based on contradicting interpretation from a broken line of disciplic succession (Prabhupāda); it is a dismissal of other interpretations as a result of a lack of status, relationship, and resources (insiders vs. outsiders). In *Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry*, Madhvan scholar Deepak Sharma explains that there are two kinds of traditions safe-guarding insider epistemologies. One claims that outsiders can never know what it is to be an insider, therefore it is impossible for the uninitiated ‘outsider’ to fully understand the *real* meaning of a text outside the tradition’s teaching/ritual experience. It is the adage of, “The outsider looking in will never understand what it means to be an insider; the insider looking out can never explain what that means to an outsider.” In the other traditional outsider/insider approach, full initiates prevent access to their tradition’s deepest meanings. There is a long tradition in the Madhvan community to restrict access to primary source material. As a non-initiate, the outsider would never be able to access the full cannon of teaching. Therefore, Madhvan scholars like Sharma confidently claim final authority. Sarma, Deepak, *Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry: Doctrine of Māhva Vedānta* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Harvey, *Bhagavad Gītā*, ix

<sup>74</sup> Harvey, *Bhagavad Gītā*, x.

<sup>75</sup> Harvey, *Bhagavad Gītā*, x.

realization is the counterattack to the destructive force originating from humanity that has convinced him to say, “I believe that the whole of humanity is now in the thick of a battle whose outcome will determine the fate of the planet.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, he understands Kurukṣetra as setting a spiritual/psychological war. Kurukṣetra is undoubtedly so, and the *Bg* begins with psychological warfare (see *Bg* 1.12-19). However, refusing to interpret the text within its context and rejecting vigorous scholarship is a recipe for *eisegesis*.

Harvey demonstrates this when he advocates for the irrelevance of the devotional nature of the text to establish an exclusive call to inwardly purifying action. Harvey’s inclusive commitment leads him to write that the truth of the *Bg* is “timeless and universal and transcends all religion.”<sup>77</sup> In Harvey’s approach, devotees gain the essential message after they abandon rigorous study and engagement in the entrenched scholarly debate. However, Kṛṣṇa challenges that perspective in *Bg* 18.70, declaring he “would [in the future] love” those *kṣatriyas* who [in the future] study/cite” (*adhyeṣyate*) the “sacred dialogue” (the *Bg*).<sup>78</sup> Harvey may have “hermeneutical privilege” to ignore or reinterpret a proof-text like *Bg* 18.70, but he risks subjugating the *Bg*’s “religious status” to his narrow hermeneutic.

Like Harvey, William F. Judge understood the significance of the combat context to be psychological and deeply spiritual because the war is symbolic. It may have been a historical event, but he recommends “reading between the lines” and opposing bogging oneself down in the historical facts. As Neufeldt summarized, “move beyond the disclosed word.”<sup>79</sup> Case in point,

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<sup>76</sup> Harvey, *Bhagavad Gītā*, xi.

<sup>77</sup> Harvey, Andrew, ed., *Bhagavad Gītā: Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), ix.

<sup>78</sup> Kṛṣṇa specifically references “our” (*āvayos*) dialogue, the ‘sacred dialogue,’ *dharmyaṃ saṁvādam*.

<sup>79</sup> Ronald F. Neufeldt, “A Lesson in Allegory,” in from Robert Minor, Robert, *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1986), 23.

from the Theosophical tradition of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Neufeldt surveys an obscure work titled, *Thoughts on the Bhagavd Gita* by A. Brahmin.

Although the war is real and actually took place, it is to be understood as a war which went on in human hearts and minds. The war symbolizes what takes place at an important juncture in human evolution, a battle between the divine and gross elements or the higher and lower selves in human beings.<sup>80</sup>

The above quote affirms the reality of the war, but it ultimately downplays the historicity of the war in its symbolic purpose of the ongoing evolution of humanity. Other interpreters dismiss the hermeneutics of outsiders because of their lack of initiation and proper reception of knowledge.

Finally, 20<sup>th</sup>-century commentators and Indian nationalist leaders understood Kṛṣṇa's teaching to Arjuna as directly relevant to their anti-colonial agendas. For example, Ranganathananda emphasized the practical application of the *Bg*, "We must realize that men and women of action, of responsibility, have the need for a philosophy of life and action."<sup>81</sup> This chapter demonstrates how hermeneutical bias (Cornille's "hermeneutical privilege") constrains and limits (impoverish) one's interpretation. In the same manner that Tom Frame warned, overly symbolic or political hermeneutics potentially "destine one's conclusion to partiality."<sup>82</sup> Referring back to Malinar, I take a more balanced approach by recognizing symbolism as it is in its *Mhbn* combat context. The emphasis on the combat context certainly resonates with a political reading.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Neufeldt, Ronald F., "A Lesson in Allegory," in *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gītā*, edited by Robert Minor, 18. Albany: Sate University Press of New York, 1986.

<sup>81</sup> Swami Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā: An Exposition of the Gita in the Light of Modern Thought and Modern Needs* (Mayavati: Swami Bodhasarananda Adhyaksha, Advaita Ashrama, 2012), vol. 1, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Frame, *Moral Injury*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> See Ch. 7. The imperative "stand" (*uttiṣṭha*) is a direct command to return to the fight, but image of Arjuna standing in the place he had just sat is symbolic of his restoration to combat-readiness .

Chapter 4: *Kurukṣetra: Re-reading the Violent, Gory Dharma Field of Battle*. Kurukṣetra is a symphony of gore. Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s question to Sañjaya sets the trajectory of the *Bg* by tethering it to the material war (*Bg* 1.1-2.9).

“In regard to understanding *dharma* [combat], what were my forces accomplishing when assembled together [and] eagerly desiring battle with the Pāṇḍavās at Kuru Field?”<sup>84</sup>

The carnage will be incomprehensible, and the display of courage is superhuman. The battles are a paradox of beauty and a scene of horrific destruction. The dialogue location is still referred to as Kurukṣetra, where in ancient times, *kṣatriyas* fulfilled sacrificial rites and their caste-directed combat. Hence, the inextricable union of *dharmakṣetre-kurukṣetre*. In the *Shalya Parvann*, Yudhiṣṭhira refers to the location as that “region reserved for heroes.”<sup>85</sup> The scene is “*samavetā, yuyutsavaḥ*,” where grim-faced men were “assembled together, desiring to fight” (*Bg* 1.1).

This chapter provides a thematic survey of different nonphysical phenomena and behavior types,<sup>86</sup> the results of *karmanighora* (“violent, gory [combat] action”). I organize the examples into the paradox of beauty, warcraft, and loss of military bearing (combat readiness). My purpose in surveying the themes is to provide an abundance of nonphysical postcombat trauma experiences connected to ECTL. I also desire to convey the visceral nature of the war. Most humans will never experience combat; therefore, I intended this chapter to provide context so nonveterans may more deeply imagine war's sheer brutality and utter waste. It is likely that when Arjuna refuses to kill his kin, he has the future scene of Kurukṣetra in mind.

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<sup>84</sup> My translation. I employ the locative of reference to the sense of the sentence pertaining to the understanding of the *dharma* actions of both armies at Kuru field, see Whitney, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, 101. The pl. p. participle and desiderative adjective, *samavetā yuyutsavas*, imply the strong desire of both armies to deploy against each other in battle. Arjuna’s crisis must have come as a surprise to the king as well for he would have expected Arjuna to lead his battle hungry foes. I infer from the imperfect middle *akurvata* from  $\sqrt{kr}$  an ongoing action as it happens.

<sup>85</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Shalya Parvan*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> I have used Ganguli’s English translation for efficiency’s sake.



Chapter 5: *Arjuna's Crisis that Disorders his Combat Readiness*. In this chapter, I examine the key terms that constitute Arjuna's crisis: *viṣīdann*, *śoka*, *dr̥ṣṭvā*, *tasmāt*, *kaśmala*, *klaibya*, and *mohas*. Arjuna is in a state of "despair" (*viṣīdann*) because he has allowed the *rajas guṇas* of "sorrowful regret" (*śoka*) to dominate his perception and reason (*dr̥ṣṭvā*, *tasmāt*). Consequently, he was "sinfully timid" (*kaśmala*) and acted like a "eunuch" (*klaibya*). He became "confused" (*mohas*) because of his inability to know the nature of combat and the reality of the battlefield. As a result, he was rendered entirely combat ineffective. However, like in forthcoming scenes, he approached Kṛṣṇa as a humble devotee, requesting his Lord and friend to "correct" him (*śādhi*). Arjuna's despair is an integrated traumatic experience. As he saw his kin, the *rajas guṇas* of passion (already swelling within him) crashed against his faculty to rightly perceive and reason his next move on the battlefield. Recalling John P. Wilson, Arjuna was experiencing one of the "extreme cases" where "the entire infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented with a new design."<sup>87</sup> Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi* (ontologically substantiated *guṇa-karma* epistemology) addressed the very heart of this crisis.

Chapter 6: *Kṛṣṇa's Guṇa-Karma Epistemology*. In response to Arjuna's request to be "corrected" or "re-ordered" (*śādhi*), Kṛṣṇa graciously offers a *guṇa-karma* epistemology that restores Arjuna's ability to rightly perceive the nature of combat and reason his next move on the battlefield. I focus on the three imperatives, "see/perceive" (*paśya*), "endure [with patient maturity]" (*titikṣasva*), and "know" (*viddhi*). In the *Bg*, the imperative *paśya* is a meta-term representing Kṛṣṇa's overarching purpose. To "see" is to understand reality as it is, to realize that in war, the soul (*ātman*) does not perish when the body is slain (*Bg* 2.18-20). To "see" is to understand the big picture, and in this essay, I focus on the implications of seeing Kṛṣṇa as the

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<sup>87</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Soul*, 9.

*rūpamaiśvara* (Bg 11.3).<sup>88</sup> But, on a day-by-day basis, Arjuna must “manage to endure” or “patiently endure” the temporal sensations of the body (and common combat phenomena), and he must “know” and *embrace* Kṛṣṇa’s ontology.<sup>89</sup> This chapter provides a framework for understanding what it means to be in a state of combat readiness. Arjuna is disordered, despairing, and confused. As we have reviewed in Ch . 4, the carnage and trauma must have been profoundly difficult to comprehend. Kṛṣṇa’s use of the middle imperative *titikṣasva* implies that there is no end to the onslaught of the *guṇas* of passion and ignorant darkness and that he *himself* must manage the *guṇas*. In addition, it is impossible to resist the *guṇas* completely in the *Kali Yuga*. Seeing, knowing, and enduring is a dynamic process that will be challenged in the war to come. As the accounts in Ch. 8 will show, Arjuna often struggled to endure the toll of war. As the devotee, Kṛṣṇa is not leading Arjuna to a moment of decision (Bg 18.73), so much as he is guiding Arjuna *beyond* that moment of declaration, “I will do your command.” Moreover, Kṛṣṇa also meant his *guṇa-karma* epistemology for life after war, and that becomes apparent when grief, sorrow, and regret continue to arise, often in Yudhiṣṭhira, who stubbornly continues to assume the mantle of blame for the war.

Chapter 7: √*Sthā*: *Stand Up: Arjuna’s Combat Response to Kṛṣṇa’s Śādhī*. The final component of Kṛṣṇa’s *guṇa-karma* epistemology is the command, “stand up.” Arjuna’s ability to perceive and reason has been re-ordered to Kṛṣṇa’s perception and reasoning. He is combat ready, and now he must act. In this chapter, I examine the meaning and implications of the imperative, *uttiṣṭha*, “stand up.”

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<sup>88</sup> *draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram*. The verb is *icchāmi* is a 1<sup>st</sup> sg. pr. indic. act of √*iṣ*. Arjuna has a strong desire to see as he really is.

<sup>89</sup> “manage to endure,” Sargeant’s translation, T

In summary, it is a call to embrace one's *dharma*-dictated, caste-required combat. When Arjuna stands and declares obedience (*Bg* 18.73), he affirms his pre-war promise to fight and kill the Kuru host. *Bg* 18.73 is a re-dedication, a re-commitment to fulfill his *dharma* and restore his brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, to the throne. It becomes a symbolic image of a *kṣatriya* who has moved from *dharma* disorder to *dharma* order. I argue that it is not the command for an ideal *kṣatriya*. Instead, it is the command given to a struggling *kṣatriya* who has experienced a profound nonphysical combat trauma (a pre-combat trauma in his case). Arjuna is not ideal, but he is the model.

Throughout the text, there are at least 125 variations of the root  $\sqrt{sthā}$ , comprising 18% of the *ślokas*. The variations are divided (approximately) into ontology/theology (almost exclusively Kṛṣṇa) and the mental discipline(s) required to be combat ready and effective. I argue that the repetition of *sthā/sthi* forms a mnemonic device within the dialogue that, interconnected, becomes a collage of meaning. This ontological/theological and missional context informs the four occurrences of *uttiṣṭha*. On a deeper level, the mnemonic device points to Sthānu, who Arjuna later saw going before him in the battle. Arjuna learns he is never alone in combat and is never the primary agent of death. Kṛṣṇa/Sthānu is with him, and wherever he is with him, there is victory.

Chapter 8: *Dharmakṣeṣṭra-Kurukṣetra: The Impact of Karmaṇighora Upon Commitment*. In this chapter, I examine general and specific accounts of the impact of “violent, gory combat” (*karmaṇighora*). Arjuna is restored and standing ready for battle, but will he *or* can he continue to endure the common traumas of war through Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi*? Is he psychologically and spiritually prepared for the gore of Kurukṣetra? The answer is no. No matter how powerfully restorative Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi* is, it cannot insulate a *kṣatriya* from experiencing the negative impact of *karmaṇighora*. This conclusion resonates with ECTL, which universally affirms that no warrior

who goes to war escapes at some level the negative cost of combat. In his groundbreaking book, *On Killing*, Dave Grossman wrote, “The dead soldier takes his misery with him, but the man who killed him must forever live and die with him. The lesson becomes increasingly clear: Killing is what war is all about, and killing in combat, by its very nature, causes deep wounds of pain and guilt.”<sup>90</sup> Kṛṣṇa intended his *śādhi* to restore or re-order and prepare Arjuna so that he would *not* “forever live and die with” those whom he killed. The essence of the killing act in the *Kali Yuga* overpowers what Wilson describes as his reconstructed “architecture of the self.”<sup>91</sup> The accounts from the war affirm the previous statement, and they also bear witness to a *kṣatriya* who is continuing to “live and die” with those whom he has killed, e.g., his role in the defeat of his grandfather, Bhīṣma. As a human being (even semi-divine), he faltered in his commitment, and the best explanation is the horrific nonphysical postcombat trauma.

Chapter 9: *Śādhi: Kṛṣṇa’s Loving ‘preparation’ and the Soul Challenge of Emerging Combat Trauma Literature*. Here I apply my thesis and draw two significant conclusions. First, I answer the research question by Brock and Lettini, “is there an adequate preparation for the psychological and spiritual consequences of killing?” Kṛṣṇa has responded to this question, but the *Mhbn* combat context modifies the *Bg*’s presentation. The war books do not contradict Kṛṣṇa. Instead, they present a fuller picture. Reading the *Bg* in isolation limits the story of Arjuna because one misses the ongoing struggles of Arjuna’s character. In other words, the *Bg* is only a partial answer to Arjuna’s saga. Secondly, I provide an insight into forthcoming ECTL. As stated several times, there is ambiguity in the field of study regarding the nature and definition of moral injury and the concept of soul wounds. I argue that the soulish ambiguity remains because no text-based

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<sup>90</sup> Grossman, Dave, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 92.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 9.

tradition dominates ontological reflection. To this challenge, I pose and answer the question, “Is there such a thing as a soul wound?” Finally, I propose future areas of research regarding feelings of meaninglessness, guilt, and regret after what appears to be a senseless slaughter, and *afterwar* issues like moral injury and veteran suicide.

# Chapter 1

## Bridging Horizons and Methodological Challenges

### Introduction

Scott Dunbar brought to attention the gap between western *jus bellum* theory and Asian perspectives.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, there is a general unfamiliarity of the *Mhba* outside non-Indian, non-Hindu audiences. To meet the gap in Hindu Studies, the discipline of Comparative Theology provides beneficial concepts and language. For example, Anthony Thiselton wrote of the “challenge of synthesizing and comparing ancient and contemporary sacred texts” as one of “distance.”<sup>93</sup> The goal is “fusion,” that moment of synthesis when you understand the connection between the ancient and present, that moment that the ‘distance’ between the two has fused into new meaning because you have made a comparative “bridge” spanning the cultural, historical, or theological “distance.”

This chapter examines how the ancient epic is a valuable sacred source on several levels. I address five ‘horizons’ of the ancient Hindu text that will be “bridged” in a way that “opens up new conversations” for ECTL.<sup>94</sup> First, there is the horizon of Comparative Theology. As an outsider to Hinduism with firm theological commitments, I still respect the *Bg*’s right to define reality for its tradition. By doing this, I avoid Devdutt Pattanaik’s criticism of western scholars who impose a foreign “template” upon Hindu texts. The second horizon is phenomenological. This section addresses the role of the epic in the past as a response to postcombat veterans, e.g., I refer to Kevin McGrath’s discussion regarding the auditory function of the epic. The third horizon is

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<sup>92</sup> Dunbar, “*Classical Hindu Views of ‘Righteous Warfare.’*”

<sup>93</sup> Thiselton, Anthony C., *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 445.

<sup>94</sup> Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 54.

textual. This section examines textual evidence and commentaries that support reading the *Bg* for insight into ECTL. Fourthly, I briefly discuss how scholars have approached the historicity and role of the combat context. Fifthly, I address the ontological horizon. In this section, I set the parameters of my ontology, examine several ontologically themed passages from the *Mhba*, and illustrate the mutual benefit of a “two-way conversation” between the *Bg* and the broader *Mhba*.

### 1.1 Comparative Theological Horizons

As a Christian theologian, the *Mhba* presents a vast alternative universe of undiscovered comparative theological possibilities for those willing to cross traditional borders and engage in “deep learning.”<sup>95</sup> Kevin McGrath refers to the *Mhbn* setting as a “hypothetical world” that “synthesizes” the “depictions” of ancient deities of an “idealized Bronze Age” with the emerging gods of what became the recorded Hindu traditions.<sup>96</sup> Those who wrote the “composite” *Mhba* joined two epochs of Indian history. In other words, they bridged socio-cultural, theological, and liturgical gaps by honoring their shared worship history and evolving theological practices. By ‘bridge,’ I mean what Anthony Thiselton proposed as the “bridging of horizons,” the “challenge of synthesizing and comparing ancient and contemporary sacred texts.” Regarding meta-claims then and now in *The Two Horizons*, Thiselton posits the hermeneutical goal as a challenge of “distance” and “fusion.” He writes,

The hermeneutical goal is that of a steady progress toward a fusion of horizons. But this is to be achieved in such a way that the particularity of each horizon is fully

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<sup>95</sup> See Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, west Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). I also approach the *Bg* in the *Mhba* as a Comparative Theologian. Van Buitenen personally sees no inherent danger of approaching with a comparative hermeneutic, and he would agree if it initially focused on the historical text. See J. A. B. Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 144.

<sup>96</sup> McGrath, Keven, *Arjuna Pāṇḍava: The Double Hero in Epic Mahābhārata* (Himayatnagar, Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2016),

taken into account and respected. This means *both* respecting the rights of the text *and* allowing it to speak.<sup>97</sup> [emphasis Thiselton]

As a Christian, it is impossible to read the *Bg* as anything other than an outsider; therefore, I have strived to give it the first word of the conversation and take the text at face value.<sup>98</sup> Thiselton addressed the commitment of respecting a sacred source's "particularity," its "rights," and its "speech." Some scholars have blurred doctrinal and theological distinctions in the *Bg*. For example, in *River of Compassion: A Christian commentary on The Bhagavad Gita*, Griffiths switches from distinguishing between unique Hindu and Christian perspectives and imposing one's theological content upon the other. Ironically, though Griffiths intends his commentary (in general) to be a two-way conversation, his Christian commentary often conflates Christian and Hindu "particularities." For example, commenting on the meaning of how God and humanity reciprocate love in *Bg* 18.65 and John 4.10, he comments, "At this point Hindu and Christian meet. We should look on the *Gita* as a revelation, analogous to that of the Gospel."<sup>99</sup>

I note two examples. For example, in one instance, Griffith retains a defined boundary between Hindu and Christian concepts. In *Bg* 11.12-13, Griffith explains Ramanuja's commentary on the *antaryamin's* relationship to the material nature of the body (*prakṛti*) as defined by Kṛṣṇa. Then he follows with the qualification, "... from a Christian point of view."<sup>100</sup> Yet, in a different

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<sup>97</sup> Thiselton, Anthony C., *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 445.

<sup>98</sup> However, the fact that I am an outsider creates an obstacle. See Deepak Sarma, *Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry: Doctrine in Mādhva Vedānta* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). For example, in the Mādhvan sources, there simply is no way to access the untranslated primary material, and even if one were to learn from a *guru* who was open to outsiders, one could never be truly confident that the information was correct, *or so goes the Mādhvan apologetic*. Therefore, in the case of Mādhva, I am indebted to well known sources such as Nagesh D. Sonde's translation of Madhva's commentary on the *Bg* and the *Tataparyanirnaya* ("Summation"), or B. N. K. Sharma's *Philosophy of Sri Madhvācārya*.<sup>98</sup> See Nagesh D. Sonde, *Bhagavad Gita Bhashya and Tataparyanirnaya* of Sri Madhva (Bombay: Vasantik Prakashan, 1995); B. N. K. Sharma, *Philosophy of Sri Madhvācārya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991).

<sup>99</sup> Griffith, Bede, *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on The Bhagavad Gita* (Templegate Publishers: Springfield, 2001), 205.

<sup>100</sup> Griffith, Bede, *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on The Bhagavad Gita*, 321-322.



instance, fusion comes at the expense of Christian doctrine, for he allows Hindu concepts to conceptualize Christian faith and practice. For example, in his remarks on *Bg* 15.18-19, he explains the dual Christian contemplative tradition as a “lower level of faith and activity” and a “higher level” where a Christian has “reached this higher state of *samadhi*” (complete contemplation).<sup>101</sup> Referring to Jesus, whom he explained had “gone beyond” his daily acts of service, and speaking on behalf of Jesus’ mental state, he writes, “In his six weeks in the desert and in the depths of his being he was enjoying pure *samadhi*.” He then provides a text-critical evaluation of the gospels and defines Jesus’s “pure contemplative” *hypostasis* with the Father as the Hindu state of “*sabaja samadhi*.” Griffith wrote that Jesus’ level of spirituality is the “state in which the yogi has gone beyond all forms of asceticism.” The former example, two perspectives are explained and compared on equal terms. However, in the latter instance, he subjects the New Testament depiction of Christ’s meditative state to the foreign theological construct, *sabaja samadhi*.

Theological particularities greatly matter. Tsoukalas emphasizes the ontological similarities *and* especially the differences between Śaṅkara and Ramanuja’s presentation of the *kṛṣṇāvatara* & the historical doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. He writes, “There is a great difference, however, between this and imposing alien philosophical and/or theological hermeneutic grids upon systems that do not belong to the systems themselves, and in so doing emerging with interpretations that are foreign to the related texts.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, citing Hyman, if the comparative philosophical “ideal of a neutral observer is illusory,” then Tsoukalas asks, “why not replace” the old system “with a new theological approach,” where [now returning to citing Hyman], “religions ... can confront and engage with each other on their terms rather than on the

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<sup>101</sup> Griffith, *River of Compassion*, 273. There are many examples. See his commentary on *Bg* 5.8-9 where he allows the *lila* (playful divine activity) of Kṛṣṇa to predicate the “Christian understanding of the activity of God,” p.86-87.

<sup>102</sup> Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ*, 9. See comments for footnote 21.

*a priori* basis... that turns out to be a covert eradication of differences.”<sup>103</sup> This thesis does not intend to eradicate or replace a hermeneutical system, yet Hindu scholars recognize the same practice that Tsoukalas and Hyman countered. Devdutt Pattanaik criticized common western symbolic interpretations for imposing Abrahamic/Christian “templates” whereby the “modern day gurus” become prophets to “tell people how to live their lives.”<sup>104</sup> Pattanaik cites films by Nina Paley as an example of a latent trend to westernize Hindu myths with western theological categories, making the original appear foreign to its long tradition of interpretation and worship.

Interpretations of sacred texts are grounded in traditions, and traditions are grounded in texts. Texts have long-established worshipping communities producing and determining orthodox/nonorthodox understanding, *especially* the Hindu, Judaic, Christian, and Koranic faiths. So the horizon is reading a sacred text as an outsider that the other’s sacred “particularity” is not compromised. Therefore, I have taken great care to allow the *Bg* to speak from its inherent authority. That is its right.

## 1.2 Phenomenological Horizons

The second challenge of a “fusion of ideas” is the distance between the war’s phenomenology and the canonization of the emerging (evolving) terms for nonphysical trauma. Thiselton explains his concept of ‘fusion’ as the moment one understands in their own time and space through the coalescing of the horizon of a text *then* (understood in its historical context) and the horizon of the reader *now*.<sup>105</sup> ECTL researchers and the ancient *Mhbn* poets share what appear to be common descriptions of nonphysical combat phenomena, e.g., guilt, anger, revenge, rash

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<sup>103</sup> Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ*, 11, citing Hyman, Gavin, “The Study of Religion and the Return of Theology,” in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (March 2004): 215.

<sup>104</sup> Pattanaik, Devdutt, “A Different Way of Seeing the World,” *Human Arenas* 4, no. 1 (December 2018), 386-395.

<sup>105</sup> Both horizons are formed and shaped by their unique traditions and context.

decisions, suicide, overwhelming sorrow, and regret. How were the *Bg* and the epic used in the past to respond to combat traumas?

There is a well-established precedent of reading the *Mhba* for historical insight into the weaponry and tactics of ancient India. For example, there is P C Chakravarti's *The Art of War in Ancient India*; Gustav Salomon Oppert's *On The Weapons, Army Organization, And Political Maxims of The Ancient Hindus*; R K Nehra's *Hinduism & Its Military Ethos*; H S Bhatia's *Political, Legal And War Philosophy in Ancient India*; O P Bharadwaj's *Ancient Kuruksetra*; Roy Kaushik's *Hindusim and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia*; Ramdhari Singh Dinakar's poem, *Kurukshetra*, translated by Ashok Sinha in *The Battlefield of Kurukshetra of the Mahabharat War*. The above examples provide an understanding of the physical combat context. There is also an ancient historical practice of reading/singing/reciting the epic to an audience of worshipers and *kṣatriyas*.

Kevin McGrath writes in *Arjuna Pāṇḍava*, "As the audience visualizes the acoustic signals of the poetry, the transformation of sound into mental imagery which occurs at this moment is arguably the occasion and instant for such a purgation and cleansing of the pain and horror caused by the experience of violence and combat," i.e., the moment of fusion.<sup>106</sup> The *Bg* and the epic form and shape devotees' lives by drawing them into the many brutal and compassionate accounts. It also provided a means for veteran *kṣatriyas* to process their combat experiences. McGrath comments that the dialogue with Kṛṣṇa acted as a "debriefing," allowing veterans to hear and see through their imagination and reflection.<sup>107</sup> In his moment in history, Sañjaya narrated with tedious

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<sup>106</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍava*, 53. See Ch. 7 of this thesis for the important usage of fusing how bards would have sung the *Mhba* and the *kṣatriyas* who would have gathered to listen.

<sup>107</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍava*, 53.

attention to detail, painting such a vivid retelling of what he witnessed that it caused the blind Kuru king (Dhṛtarāṣṭra) to experience grief and regret.

The horrendously graphic (*ghore*) details of the war could also be a subtle, imaginative invitation to stand amidst the phenomenology of the field. The visual nature of the combat would have certainly connected with the *kṣatriyas*. When understood this way, the reader could embrace the violent, gory action (*karmanighora*, see *Bg* 3.1) for what it may imply, rather than immediately assigning it a metaphorical/symbolic meaning to ‘life’ or a universal interior ‘struggle’ of humanity. Jonathon Shay demonstrated how this is the function of the story of *The Odyssey*, Homer’s sequel to *The Illiad*, narrating the ten years it took for the veterans of the Trojan War to return home.<sup>108</sup> Arjuna’s crisis was the *par excellence* of his age, and Sañjaya reported an exceptionally sensory experience of the war, e.g., fingers floating like fish in a stream of blood. In doing so, as Bandlamudi Lakshmi wrote, “the meaning-making process becomes vibrant.”<sup>109</sup> McGrath points out that when the poem’s audience enacted the epic as a play, it was “through the hearing of the events... [he] is able to visualize them for himself.”<sup>110</sup>

Respecting the rights and allowing an ancient text to speak requires imagination. As David Cheetham suggested in *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions*, imagination may become a form of comparative play that opens new possibilities for theological reflection. A “comparative imagination” is warranted, lest contemporary readers miss practical applications from ancient

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<sup>108</sup> See Shay, Jonathon, *Odysseus in America* (Scribner: 2003).

<sup>109</sup> Lakshmi, Bandlamudi, *Dialogics of Self, The Mahabharata, and culture* (New York: Anthem Press, 2010), 158. <https://birmingham-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com> (Accessed August 2021). Lakshmi references I. M. Lotman, see *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 136.

<sup>110</sup> McGrath, Kevin, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahabharata* (Boston: Ilex Foundation and the Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011), distributed by Harvard University Press, 50.

sources.<sup>111</sup> Robert Neville writes that modern readers may be “experiencers or interpreters” who “engage the world.”<sup>112</sup> David Tracy explains,

Theologians must risk interpretation of the meaning and truth of these classic texts... whose effective history forms the horizon of our own efforts to understand and appropriate, to retrieve and criticize the reality of the religious dimension of the culture. To risk an interpretation of the religious classics of the culture is, in its manner, to risk entering the most dangerous conversation of all. For there the most serious questions on the meaning of existence and participating in, yet distanced, sometimes even estranged from, the reality of the whole are posed.<sup>113</sup>

The tone of the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is calm but firm, and it invites the reader to engage in the “most serious questions.” Tracey’s point is that interpretation is risky because one attempts to interpret the meaning of a sacred text’s fundamental questions of existence, i.e., its particularities.<sup>114</sup> The *Mhba*’s perspective, its “history,” “forms the horizon of our efforts to understand and appropriate” its message to ECTL.

### 1.3 The Textual Horizon

We know that the epic was a means for veterans to process their postcombat trauma. However, are there textual clues and support from commentary to read the *Bg* for insight into ECTL? The following four sub-sections address Kṛṣṇa’s final word of the *Bg*, commentary of scholars, Sañjaya’s final word in his epilogue, and Kṛṣṇa’s ideal and Arjuna’s reality.

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<sup>111</sup> See David Cheetham, *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). “Comparative imagination” is helpful for notionally similar connections between ancient and modern.

<sup>112</sup> Neville, Robert Cummings, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: Theology as Symbolic Engagement* (New York: t & t clark, 2006), 57. Keith Ward elaborates on the role of imagination in theology, not acting so much as to “correspond to as express the character of that reality,” in *Religion & Revelation* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994), 71.

<sup>113</sup> Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 155. To not risk interpretation in the public is to become irrelevant.

<sup>114</sup> From previous discussion from Thiselton, *Two Horizons*.

### 1.3.1 Kṛṣṇa's Final Word

*Bg* 18.70 ends with Kṛṣṇa stating his final “thought” or “word” (*iti me matis*). Ramanuja opts for “such is my view,”<sup>115</sup> There are other alternatives, such as “conviction,” “judgment,” “determination,” “belief,” or “resolution.”<sup>116</sup> Griffith’s “my truth” strikes at the heart of Kṛṣṇa’s ontologically substantiated *guṇa-karma* epistemology (*śādhi*).<sup>117</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* is the *exclusive* truth. Radhakrishnan opts for “so I hold.”<sup>118</sup> It implies a firm commitment. Another option from the *Mhba* and *Kāvya* literature is “doctrine.”<sup>119</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*, his “design” and “purpose,” is the doctrine that re-orders Arjuna to a state of combat readiness.<sup>120</sup> Arjuna’s fallacious reasoning was an example of *kumata* (“bad doctrine”),<sup>121</sup> and he is not to be a *durmatis* (“dope,” *Bg* 18.16).<sup>122</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s purpose is to restore Arjuna to a *dharmatattvavid*, “one who knows the truths of laws and religion.”<sup>123</sup>

In *Bg* 12.19, *matis* is joined with the adjective *sthira* to make *sthiramatis*. Tsoukalas provides an option for *sthiramatis* as “one whose thought is immovable.” I understand it as describing the normal state of combat readiness, “[standing] steady minded.” Combat readiness enables combat effectiveness, for a *kṣatria* cannot execute *dharmā*-defined, cast-required combat if not adequately prepared for fighting, killing, and enduring the phenomenology of the battlefield

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<sup>115</sup> Svāmī Ādidevānanda, trans., *Śrī Rāmānuja Gita Bhāṣya* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2019), 601. So also Debroy, *the bhagavad gita*, 255, (“my view”),

<sup>116</sup> For instance, Ranganathananda, “conviction,” 364; Deutsch, “thought,” 139; Sargeant, “thought,” 731; Gandhi, “my belief,” 203; Warrior, “my view,” *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 635. Ranchor Prime most likely uses “the intellect,” 197, but because he collapses the final two *ślokas*, it is difficult if he intends “my intellect” to refer to *matis* or “knowledge sacrifice” (*jñānayajñena*); so also Prabhupada “my intelligence,” 709; Fosse changes the f. nom. sg. into a verb, “I believe,” 173; so also, Fowler, “so I believe,” 300.

<sup>117</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 323.

<sup>118</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, 451.

<sup>119</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 783. Tsoukalas does not list this option, see *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 6, 464.

<sup>120</sup> The options of “design” and “purpose” are used in *The Mhba* and *The Bhāgavad Purāṇa*.

<sup>121</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 292.

<sup>122</sup> Literally, a “block head.”

<sup>123</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 511.

(see Ch. 7.2-3). Therefore, on its most practical level, combat readiness is to remain “indifferent” (*anapekṣas*, v16) to commonly experienced traumas.

Kṛṣṇa lists situations where Arjuna must not show preference (see *Bg* 12.16-19). For example, remaining “anxiety-free” (*gatavyathas*), “rejoicing” (*hr̥ṣyati*) and “hating” (*dveṣṭi*), “mourning” (*śocati*), “desiring” (*kāṅkṣati*), the “same” (*samas*) approach to an “enemy” (*śatrau*) or a “friend” (*mitre*), “honoring or disgracing” (*mānāpamānayos*), in “cold and heat and pleasure and pain” (*śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu*), indifferent and “alike in blame or praised” (*tulyanindāstutis*), “silent” (*maunī*), “content with all” (*saṃtuṣṭo yena kenacit*),<sup>124</sup> and “homeless” (*aniketas*). The above examples are all similar to nonphysical wounding addressed in detail within ECTL (see Ch. 2). Here Kṛṣṇa associates specific phenomena that will be observed again and again in the war to come at Kurukṣetra (see Ch. 4). In *Bg* 18.70, *matir* represents more than theology, ontology, cosmology, and cosmogony, etc. On a day-day-level, Kṛṣṇa has in mind the nonphysical phenomena associated with war. He must stand and fight as one who is “steady-minded,” especially when he questions why Kṛṣṇa is “causing him to be [*inseparably*] yoked to violent, gory [combat] actions” (*Bg* 3.1).

### 1.3.2 Commentary of Scholars

Hindu scholars differ on the scope of Kṛṣṇa’s audience when he makes the mokṣic promises to future devotees who overtly “explain” (*abhidhāsyati*) the “supreme secret” (*paramaṃ guhyam*) and spend time themselves in “serious study” (*adhyeṣyate*) of the “sacred conversation” (*dharmyaṃ saṃvādam*, *Bg* 18.68, 70).<sup>125</sup> Most commentators generally acknowledge the limited

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<sup>124</sup> Note Tsoukas has a different version with in the place of *saṃtuṣṭo*. See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 6, 390.

<sup>125</sup> In v68, Kṛṣṇa “assured a [path] to him” for the teacher who “will in the future explain this supreme mystery,” but he appears to have restricted his secret to an audience of Hindu “devotees.” See “assured a [path] to him” (*mām*

scope of a solely Hindu audience of devotees but agree that religion's general nature is to be shared with others.

Fowler qualifies all devotees as having unique “levels of consciousness,” determined by their past *karma* from previous lives.<sup>126</sup> Griffiths further qualifies that the *Bg* is not to be studied “simply academically.”<sup>127</sup> Yet, meditation and worship usually lead to a devotee *wanting* to share their message with others. Fowler writes that the devotee is not to conceal the secret but to “share” it [with other devotees].<sup>128</sup> To some, sharing the message is necessary. Yogananda writes that “saints” (devotees) cannot fully experience liberation (*mokṣa*) *until* they become Kṛṣṇa’s “instrument of spiritual awakening in at least a few devotees.”<sup>129</sup> Additionally, the premise behind Griffith’s commentary, *River of Compassion*, is that Christians may read and understand the profundity of the *Bg* and apply it to their faith.

Finally, Prabhupada states that the supreme secret is “not for philosophical speculators.” It is not simply a matter of discussion and debate without a correlating action. Yet, his statement may be applied to non-Hindu outsiders. He continues, “Anyone, however, who tries sincerely to present

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*evaiṣyaty asaṁśayah*); “supreme secret” (*paramaṁ guhyaṁ*); “explain to my worshippers” (*madbhaktesv abhidhāsyati*); “devotion” (*bhaktiṁ*); “have made the supreme devotion” (*bhaktiṁ mayi parāṁ kṛtvā*). However, v67 sets the standards by restricting v65-66 to dedicated and pure hearted devotees who are “openly desirous of hearing” the content of Arjuna’s and Kṛṣṇa’s conversation *while in battle*. See “openly desirous of hearing” as a positive translation of *na cāśuśrūṣave vācyam*. Of course, Arjuna is a devotee which he symbolizes by sitting, expressing his anguish, and seeking Kṛṣṇa to “correct” him, or “order” him (*śādhi*). There is an adverb (*eva*) that could be used as a rhythmic filler or in the translation to restrict his promises to a present and a future qualified devotee (v67), “*only* he will come to me.” See *mām evaiṣyaty asaṁśayas*. But, translating *eva* is not necessary, and it could be rendered, “he will truly come to me.” Thus, there is a nuance that infers a Hindu and non-Hindu audience. In v70, Kṛṣṇa promised that “he who in the future will study this sacred conversation” (*dharmyaṁ saṁvādam*) having performed the “knowledge sacrifice” will demonstrate for others how Kṛṣṇa “should be loved.” See “he who will study this sacred dialogue” (*adhyeṣyate ca ya imaṁ dharmyaṁ saṁvādam*); “knowledge sacrifice” (*jñānayajñena*); “have loved him” (*iṣṭah syām*). However, a text such as this does not have to be restricted to a Hindu audience, for there are plenty of examples of how Hindus offer the *Bg* to outsiders.

<sup>126</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 300.

<sup>127</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 323.

<sup>128</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 300. I opt to translate *guhyaṁ* as “mystery.” See also, Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, 400; Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 6., 459-460; van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata*, 145.

<sup>129</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks with Arjuna* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1999), vol. 2, 1094.



*Bhagavad-gita* as it is will advance in devotional activities and reach the pure devotional life.”<sup>130</sup> Yet, Prabhupada makes a distinction between what is “generally advised” and the reward to “*anyone*” who shares what they have learned from the *Bg* “*as it is*.”<sup>131</sup> Prabhupada implies that a non-devotee seeker may advance in their understanding. Easwaran’s translation of v71 may suggest the same possibility, “even those who listen with faith, free from doubts, will find a happier world where good people dwell.”<sup>132</sup> Easwaran refers to the approved devotees (v67), but he does not strictly exclude potential devotees, who, like adventurers, “seek to explore not mountains or jungles but consciousness itself: whose real drive, we might say, is not so much to know the unknown as to know the knower.”<sup>133</sup>

### 1.3.3 Sañjaya’s Final Word (Epilogue, *Bg* 18.74-78)

In the *Bg* 18.78, Sañjaya echoes Kṛṣṇa’s final words with his own final words of the epilogue, “this is my thought” (*matis mama*). I again opt for “conclusion,” “determination,” or “conviction.” Sargeant’s “thought” is a bit too common to capture the meaning of Sañjaya’s final words. Sañjaya’s conclusion that there is victory when Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa fight (v78) is an affirmation of an ancient truth of the unique relationship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. They are undefeatable. It was common knowledge, especially to Arjuna (see Ch 5).

With the combination of the aorist active “I have heard” and the causative accusative preposition “causing the hair to stand on end” (*Bg* 18.74), Sañjaya infers a spiritually restorative nature to the dialogue. The dialogue has similarly impacted Sañjaya but with a different meaning. He describes his hair standing on end which may be a euphemism for a common combat

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<sup>130</sup> Prabhupada, *Bhagavad Gītā As It Is*, 708.

<sup>131</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>132</sup> Easwaran, Eknath, *The Bhagavad Gita* (Tomales: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 264.

<sup>133</sup> Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 8.

phenomenon associated with fear, carnage, and anticipation of properly sanctioned combat (see Ch. 4). Sañjaya’s perception and response become the example of how a *kṣatriya* with faith *should* respond to Kṛṣṇa’s grace-filled words (*prasādāc*). Even Dhṛtarāṣṭra stood to benefit.<sup>134</sup> The implication is that there is an intrinsic spiritual power when a *kṣatriya* perceives (through reading/hearing), when he understands, and when he responds obediently to Kṛṣṇa’s commands.<sup>135</sup>

There is a deeper meaning to Sañjaya’s epilogue. Sañjaya is the example of Kṛṣṇa’s ideal *kṣatriya*—or, at least, an ideal response. He sees, he hears, and he conveys the message of the *Bg* to a great hero of the epic, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who is struggling with his *a-dharma* support for his eldest son, Duryodhana, the wicked culprit primarily guilty for causing the war. In his epilogue, Sañjaya responded to the content of the *Bg*,<sup>136</sup> and as the model of obedience, his conclusion is no less stirring. Of great importance, Sañjaya stated that he “rejoiced again and again” after he “remembered again and again” both the “marvelous conversation” (*saṁvādam adbhutam*, *Bg* 18.76) and Kṛṣṇa’s “exceedingly marvelous form of Hari (Kṛṣṇa)” (*rūpam atyadbhutaṁ*, *Bg* 18.77). I infer that Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* is always word *and* presence.

Sañjaya emphasizes the reflective nature of his experience four times with three different strings: *ca saṁsmṛtya saṁsmṛtya* in *Bg* 18.76, 77; *ca muhur muhuḥ* in *Bg* 18.76; *ca punaḥ punaḥ* in *Bg* 18.77. His expression has the force of recalling the truth of Kṛṣṇa’s words *and* the vision of Kṛṣṇa’s marvelous form. The repetition emphasizes the dialogue’s important role, implying the author (Vyāsa) and narrator (Sañjaya) intended it to be re-membered, re-thought, re-told, reflected

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<sup>134</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 481. The notion of the Kuru King and narrator as active recipients and exemplars is picked up in A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad Gītā As It Is* (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983), 713. See also Yogananda, Paramahansa, *The Bhagavad Gītā: Royal Science of God-Realization* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2013), 1100.

<sup>135</sup> Vinoba Bhave emphasizes the tension of the paradox of the freedom Kṛṣṇa offers in his final summary and with the compelling appeal (accusative *śaranam* + impv *vraja aham*, “Take refuge in me”), Vinoba Bhave, *Talks on the Gita* (London: Ruskin House, 1960), 268.

<sup>136</sup> *matī mama*, “my thought.”

upon, re-enacted, re-appreciated and re-applied *again and again* from generation to generation. Just as Sañjaya received the *Bg* as an act of grace, so would others who hear, read, and study.<sup>137</sup>

Radhakrishnan writes that the truths of the *Bg* are not “philosophical propositions” but “spiritual facts” requiring more than rote repetition. Remembering ‘spiritual facts’ involves a memory function so that *kṣatriyas* may be encouraged to live daily in an attitude of prayer and meditation (*bhaktiyoga*).<sup>138</sup> Imitating what may be Sañjaya’s discipline of remembering and rejoicing over and over would fulfill Radhakrishnan’s insistence on a spiritual experience as opposed to a dead religious action. Essentially, this is the heart of what Sañjaya intended—a divine dialogue whereby *kṣatriyas* may recollect the powerful meaning of their actions. The adverb “that” (*tad*) and its proximity in *Bg* 18.77 to Kṛṣṇa’s “exceedingly marvelous form” (*rūpam atyadbhutaṃ*) directly relates the epistemological function of the pivotal event to the storyteller’s “great amazement” (*vismayo mahān*) and his announcement of ongoing rejoicing.<sup>139</sup>

Moreover, his immediate physiological response in *Bg* 18.74 is an intentional contrast to Arjuna’s hair standing on end (*Bg* 1.29). While Arjuna’s experience expressed a negatively disordered state of combat *ineffectiveness*, Sañjaya’s hair-raising experience illustrated the proper *kṣatriya* response.

### 1.3.4 Kṛṣṇa’s Ideal and Arjuna’s Reality

Arjuna begins the *Bg* asserting a moral superiority that he believes to be grounded in an adequately reasoned perception of close combat. Initially, he is misguided, but his final declaration

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<sup>137</sup> “Vyāsa’s grace,” *vyāsa-prasādāc*, appears in the ablative, therefore, “from grace” or “through grace.” Vyāsa is the source.

<sup>138</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 454.

<sup>139</sup> *Bg* 18.77, *hr̥ṣyāmi* from the present indicative active of √*hr̥ṣ*, “I *continually* rejoice.”

of restoration and obedience confirms his return to *dharma* (Bg 18.73). He is also presented as *the* exemplar of what a *kṣatriya* will be *when* he requests to be “corrected” or “re-ordered” (Bg 2.7). By the dialogue's conclusion, the *Bg* presents Arjuna as a universal example, a humbled, truth-seeking, Kṛṣṇa-worshipping friend who, after a long discourse with ‘God,’ confesses to being combat ready and focused once again on fighting and killing. He is once again what he appeared to be at the commencement of the war, a man with a profound *dharma*-determined, caste-required commitment. His final declaration meant at that time that he understood how to worship Kṛṣṇa as a *kṣatriya* in single-minded devotion, indifferent to all aspects of life and war.

His final declaration appears to be the model of a *kṣatriya* extolled by Sañjaya in his final *śloka*. But the revered Sañjaya knew the chronological history of the epic. He knew there was no perfect *kṣatriya* in the *Kali Yuga* (age) because only one-quarter of *dharma* was available. In the entire combat context of the epic, I suggest Sañjaya could not have intended any possibility of an *ideal* example of a *kṣatriya* receiving the spoils of war (Bg 18.78). Likewise, Kṛṣṇa knew that his teaching presented *ideal dharma* only possible in a different *yuga*. Therefore, he knew that Arjuna would never fulfill the standard, although Arjuna’s confidence initially seems to point to his believing himself to be in that idyllic state. I infer that Kṛṣṇa knew Arjuna would struggle to meet the ideal in the war, and perhaps this aspect grants more credibility to his teaching and efficacy.

Therefore, I translate v78 and interject some contextually nuanced interpretation, “Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, wherever there is a *reordered* Arjuna *with* Kṛṣṇa, there will be splendor, well-being, wealth, and moral guidance.”<sup>140</sup> In addition, Arjuna knew the dharmic restrictions of

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<sup>140</sup> I take the liberty to insert the “*any rightly ordered* warrior,” for to be wrongly ordered is to be *adharma*, and the sense of the *śloka* is provided by the final declaration of Arjuna to be obedient to his *dharma*.

the *yuga*, and he did not forget the ancient truth of his unique relationship with Kṛṣṇa. He knew there was no possible means of fulfilling his pre-war commitment in a state of perfect *dharma*.

As the most heralded combat veteran of countless lives, he would struggle with balancing a state of *budhis* informed *karmaṇighora* (cf. *Bg* 3.1, 8). By the time he sat before Kṛṣṇa, he had already begun to discern his less-than-ideal initial perception of the battlefield. He knew by *Bg* 2.7 that he had not allowed himself to be led by the *guṇas* of truth (*sattva*), which would have compelled him to dismiss his responses originating in the *guṇas* of “passion” and “ignorant darkness” (*rajas/tamas*; see Ch. 6).

Sañjaya’s final statement brings a universal scope and application. There is a universal “wherever” (*yatra*) and a local “there” (*tatra*). What happened there is applicable everywhere, hence, “wherever Lord of Yoga, Kṛṣṇa,” “wherever son of Pṛthā” (*Bg* 18.78). The duo will bring victory and the spoils of war. However, reading these final statements with an eye toward combat trauma leads me to move away from Sargeant’s “splendor” (*śrīs*), “victory” (*vijayas*), “wealth” (*bhūtis*), and “righteousness” (*nītis*). Instead, I opt for a more contextualized choice (so also Tsoukalas) of “well-being” and “moral guidance.” Though Tsoukalas comments that the four rewards can be understood in a “militaristic” sense, he concedes it would limit the dialogue to the *kṣatriya* caste.<sup>141</sup> Choosing “well-being” and “moral guidance” resonates with the repeated examples of *kṣatriyas* struggling to remain indifferent to their actions and life after combat.

“Well-being” and “moral guidance” naturally correspond with the list of common nonphysical traumas, emotions, and results of the war (cf. *Bg* 12.16-19). Even the mentioning of being “steady of mind” and indifferent to your present “homelessness” (*aniketas*) resonates with

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<sup>141</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 6, 491.

ECTL, for homelessness is a top threat to combat veterans. Secondly, when Arjuna rises and begins to fight, it is not long before he and Yudhiṣṭhira struggle in the war. They simply can never maintain the ideal. They cannot hold a sense of well-being even in the presence of Kṛṣṇa though he, on several occasions, reconciles their brotherly relationship. Additionally, translating *nītis* as “moral guidance” is a more potent option over “righteousness.” *Dharma* righteousness is the assumed state of combat readiness and effectiveness. Reading from the combat context, the choice of “moral guidance” ties in with the examples of receiving guidance and clarification from Kṛṣṇa in the war. More importantly, it harkens back to Kṛṣṇa’s initial rebuke of Arjuna’s faulty moral superiority of why he could not kill the Kurus (*Bg* 1.32, 35, 36-47; 2.4-6). Arjuna reasoned that it is to “do great evil,” yet, this is the “work” (*matkarmakṛn*, *Bg* 18.55) to which Kṛṣṇa “had prepared” (*udyatās*, *Bg* 1.45) all *kṣatriyas* to fulfill (*Bg* 11.33-34 55).

I draw this sub-section to a close with a later scene in the *Karna Parvan*. In that story, we find an example of Arjuna vacillating between the ideal hero and the struggling *kṣatriya*. There is a direct reference to Sthānu in the context of an intense exchange of *karmanighora*. Arjuna was not fighting as all of heaven and earth knew he could and *should* fight, for he had displayed his prowess 13 years prior in the duel of all duels. While engaged with Karna, Bhīma rightly perceived his unwillingness to commit to the fight. Bhīma became enraged and questioned Arjuna’s prowess and his “indifference” to Karna, who insulted Kṛṣṇa in Duryodhana’s court. He substantiated his observation regarding Arjuna’s unique pre-war preparation when he received the celestial weapons, having pleased Sthānu by unknowingly dueling Hara/*Śaṅkara* to a stalemate. Hara finally incapacitated Arjuna by striking him dumb.

It was a widely known story, for, years later, his grandson, King Janamejaya, requested that Sañjaya recount the full unabridged version. Bhīma specifically cited that in those majestic

moments in Indra’s abode, he had personally encountered and physically experienced the “touch” of Sthānu. Having this been the case, he questions why he is not fighting now like he so gloriously fought, pleasing the supreme being. His opponent now is nothing more than a man.<sup>142</sup> Bhīma exhorts Arjuna to take the initiative on the battlefield because of that personal experience. Kṛṣṇa joined the rebuke and encouraged him to behead Karna with the same calm and collected warcraft that he had displayed in countless prior lives.<sup>143</sup> In this scene, we see the ideal (from ages past) and the struggling *kṣatriya* of the present. Bhīma references Sthānu’s divine character and actions (ontology) as the basis for Arjuna’s return to a fully committed fighter (co-mission). Kṛṣṇa references Arjuna’s ideal moments of warcraft as the basis of his appeal to reengage Karna with his full prowess.

## 1.4 Historical Horizon

### 1.4.1 Historicity, or not

While the evidence of historicity or lack thereof is significant, it is not a defeater. Yet, one’s commitment to historicity impacts the interpretation of the *Bg*. The immediate context of the battle contradicts a mere “ego-focal preoccupation with acquisition and comfort.”<sup>144</sup> Drawing from Robert Meagher’s *Killing from the Inside Out*, Kurukṣetra was a climatic, fratricidal, ancient Indian “sweet rendezvous of war.”<sup>145</sup>

Commentators differ regarding the nature of the rendezvous of war. For example, Ranchor Prime emphasizes the spiritual over the physical location of Kurukṣetra as the “inner space of

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<sup>142</sup> Karna was not actually a fully human. He was semi-divine born being like Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>143</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Karna Parvan*, 89.

<sup>144</sup> Lele, Jayant, “On Regaining the Meaning of the “Bhagavad Gita” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23, no. 2, BHAGAVADGITA: On the Bi-centennial of its First Translation into English (Summer, Fall 1988),162.

<sup>145</sup> Meagher, Robert Emmet and Paul Fleschner, *Killing from the Inside Out*, 29. See Homer, *Illiad* 17.228.

emptiness and doubt,” whereby God allows all humans to fall through the similar experience of “illusion” (*mohas*).<sup>146</sup> Radhakrishnan concedes the historicity of Kṛṣṇa as irrelevant “so far as the teaching” pertains to the *Bg*.<sup>147</sup> Aurobindo affirms Kṛṣṇa’s historicity, but he admits that the “eternal incarnation of the Divine” over the historical figures is primarily significant for spirituality.<sup>148</sup> Yogananda emphasizes the fault of ignoring the historicized interpretation. Yet, he also emphasizes the importance of discerning a description of a moral or spiritual experience within the prescription of “deeper esoteric intent.” He avoids the tendency to “drag a hidden meaning out of everything.”<sup>149</sup> Griffiths refers to the historical predicament of Arjuna, yet he emphasizes the symbolism of Arjuna, the body, the war, and his unavoidable “righteous combat” (*dharma-yuddha*). He comments that the lessons do not exist “on the human level to the problems of life.” It is only when the “Spirit” intervenes that Arjuna (and we) find clarity.<sup>150</sup>

Yogananda views the entire *Mhba* as a metaphorical tool based on actual events intended as a means of experiencing the spiritual, material, and psychological truth of “God-Realization.” Yogananda explains that the “main theme” of the *Bg* is the struggle of our representative (Arjuna) to discover how to practice the renouncement (*sannyasa*) of his selfhood, presently calcified through ignorance (*avidya*). Meditation (*samadhi*) is how the ego is reunited to Spirit (represented by Kṛṣṇa), replacing the delusion from the ego and material attachments to desires.<sup>151</sup> Accordingly, one may have an interior steadiness, an evenness of mind. In his teaching, intelligence/knowledge

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<sup>146</sup> Prime, *Bhagavad Gītā: Talks Between the Soul and God*, xiv.

<sup>147</sup> Radhakrishnan, S., *The Bhagavadgītā* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2010), 22.

<sup>148</sup> Aurobindo, Sri, ed., Anilbaran Roy, *The Message of the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2014), 360.

<sup>149</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa, *The Bhagavad Gītā: Royal Science of God-Realization* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2013), xxiii.

<sup>150</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 8-9. Griffith is a prime example of a Christian commentator merging theological categories. Note how he capitalizes ‘Spirit,’ yet provides no identifying predicate. I infer he has in mind the Christian Third Person of the Trinity (Holy Spirit). However, his missing predicate most likely means a general sense

<sup>151</sup> Yogananda, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, xvii-xxvii.



(*buddhis*) and action (*karma*) play at differing levels of epistemological importance. The intelligence which enables enlightenment is supreme, while the required activities of the body in the world are secondary and inescapable realities. In other words, doctors will doctor, salesmen will sell, and warriors will war.

For Yogananda, the most crucial context of the *Bg* is the spiritual battle. For example, he comments in *Bg* 2.31 that the “spiritual warrior” must embrace the “supreme duty to strive to rout her enemy invaders of ignorance by fighting to acquire wisdom.” Therefore, for Yogananda, spiritual warriors muster their combatants (discrimination and meditative calmness) on the battlefield (introspection). Despite his emphasis, Yogananda makes a solid application to the material battlefield. The righteous interior battle is the means through which warriors are to process the latter “righteous material battle.”<sup>152</sup> Yogananda further comments that contemporary warriors sanctioned by the state should not hesitate to preserve their homeland; the “spiritual warrior” should not hesitate to defend their “inner kingdom of peace.” The former should not hesitate to kill or be killed in his righteous mission.

Commentators recognize the *Bg*’s connection to time and space. Angelika Malinar points out that the *Bg* is connected to the greater *Mhbn* context by way of textual “devices . . . typical of the epic’s depiction of a confrontation on the battlefield.”<sup>153</sup> Additionally, Barbara Stoler Miller notes the location of the *Bg* provides a “concrete context.”<sup>154</sup> The historical region of Kurukṣetra is well attested as a holy land and a place of sacrifice with corroborating geographical markers.<sup>155</sup> Rosen writes that while the “implications” of the *Bg* are transcendent, the allegorical nature of the

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<sup>152</sup> Yogananda, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, 244-49.

<sup>153</sup> Malinar, *The Bhagavadgita: Doctrines and Contexts*, 57.

<sup>154</sup> Miller, Barbara Stoler, *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), 2.

<sup>155</sup> Bharadwaj, O. P., *Ancient Kuruksetra: Studies in Historical & Cultural Geography* (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1991), 7-8.

text remains “subservient” to the literal (interpretation) “militaristic imagery,” culminating in an epically violent end.<sup>156</sup> But, others do not understand the goal of the text to be a physically violent end. Mahesh Kumar Sharan emphasized that violence was a “last resort,” and only by way of isolating an imperative (e.g., fight, kill) and misunderstanding its broader context may one interpret that it “inculcates manslaughter.”<sup>157</sup> Rosen wrote that Arjuna “preferred a peaceful solution.” Still, this statement appears odd when on the following page, he states that to grasp the “underpinnings of the [Mahabharatan] war,” one must understand that “According to the epic itself, the war is part of God’s *lila*” or “spiritual pastime.”<sup>158</sup> War is a drama for Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna is the central character trapped in a dilemma of “not my will, but your will be done.”

J. A. B. van Buitenen questioned the trend of reading the text as one “titanic myth” rather than identifying occasions of myth.<sup>159</sup> He referred to these as “holistic interpretations,” whose commitment to a mythic symbolism “consciously cast aside” historicity.<sup>160</sup> I view the combat context in line with van Buitenen’s “personal preference” that the characters, scenes, and battles are more enjoyable when they are not mythicized into a symbolic ambiguity. Van Buitenen explains his approach as the “willingness to listen to what the text has to say in so many words before groping for what it is *not* saying in so many words.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Rosen, Steven J., *Krishna’s Song: A New Look at the Bhagavad Gita* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 22.

<sup>157</sup> Mahesh Kumar Sharan, *The Bhagavad Gita and Hindu Sociology* (Delhi: Bharat Bharati Bhandar, 1977), 10, cited in Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>158</sup> Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, *Ibid.*, 23. A common translation of *lila* is “play.”

<sup>159</sup> See also Sharma, Arvind, “Bhagavadgita: the Dialectic of an Allegory” *Indian Literature* 21, no. 3 (May 1978): 146-150. [https://www-jstor-org.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/stable/23334399?sid=primo&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/stable/23334399?sid=primo&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents). (Accessed August 2021).

<sup>160</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3, 142.

<sup>161</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3, 143.

### 1.4.2 The Significant Purpose of *The Bhagavadgītā*

Saṅjaya states that Kṛṣṇa “himself” has personally dialogued with Arjuna.<sup>162</sup> Śaṅkara references how Kṛṣṇa communicated “directly” and “not indirectly through disciples.”<sup>163</sup> Van Buitenen adds “in person,” and Haven O’More, in his preface, writes that while “many approaches” read the *Bg* “isolated from its context,” the *Mhba* will not “permit this attempted removal and interpretation.” Such an approach is a “tearing away” from its “great sacred source,” and it will result in missing the most profound understanding of its “innermost treasures.”<sup>164</sup> Because of this, Kṛṣṇa’s teachings are not to be removed from their native context. Even so, some interpreters concede the ultimate unimportance of historicity. For example, though Yogananda views the spiritual as the means of fulfilling one’s material *dharma*, he writes,

It will become evident to the reader after thoughtful perusal of the key to a few stanzas in the first chapter that the historical background of a battle and the contestants therein have been used for the purpose of illustrating the spiritual and psychological battle going on between the attributes of the pure discriminative intellect in attunement with the soul and the blind sense-infatuated mind under the delusive influence of the ego.<sup>165</sup>

In Yogananda’s approach, historicity is ultimately irrelevant because the lessons are spiritual and psychological. The only battle that ultimately matters is the struggle between the “pure discriminative intellect” in relationship to the soul and the base mind under the influence of the ego. On a popular level, Andrew Harvey prefaces his edited work, *Bhagavad Gita: Annotated & Explained*,

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<sup>162</sup> See *svayam* in *Bg* 18.75. See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 481-483.

<sup>163</sup> Warrior, A. G. Krishna, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984), 639.

<sup>164</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahabharata*, 145; ix. Van Buitenen includes the preceding and immediate context following the episode of the *Bg*. Accordingly, the *Bg* scene is actually about 50% longer and though the preceding context adds no significant contribution to its theological/philosophical meaning, they are important to understanding the origin of Arjuna’s despair and his part in killing Bhīma.

<sup>165</sup> Yogananda, *God Talks with Arjuna*, xxvi.

The dialogue it enshrines between the divine avatar Krishna and the soldier Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra is always taking place within the heart and soul of every human being on the battlefield of this terrible and beautiful world ... What the Gita does is dramatize in the most inspired way imaginable and for all time the full truth of this dialogue and the initiation it can make possible into full human divine life ... I believe that the whole of humanity is now in the thick of a battle whose outcome will determine the fate of the planet.<sup>166</sup>

Perhaps, but the combat context presumes historicity, and as Hill states, it is “reasonable to suppose” Kṛṣṇa was indeed a *kṣatriya* warrior at Kurukṣetra.<sup>167</sup> There is a historical probability of a Vasudeva cultus that evolved into the worship of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>168</sup> Noting the limited historical evidence impeding a judgment concerning the origins of Kṛṣṇa, Fowler suggests we follow Hill’s approach of “diffidence.”<sup>169</sup> In other words, one may affirm the historicity of Kṛṣṇa with a cautious certainty despite the lack of confidence in the amount of historical data.

Furthermore, we remember that the greater context of the *Bg* is the “warrior legend.”<sup>170</sup> It tells the story of two great families alongside Kṛṣṇa as their lives end. This compilation of stories forming the background to this great battle of epic proportions with the *Ramayana* occupies the highest cherished positions within Hindu literature. The length of the epic exceeds 100,000 *ślokas* (verses), and the legendary heroics, love, and betrayal are well known, especially the childhood exploits of Kṛṣṇa. Feuerstein notes that the subtle “epic kernel” of the *Mhba* is the developing strife between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍava cousins, which came to a practical and philosophical climax in the brief 18 chapters that constitute the *Bg*.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, the brief moment on the battlefield cannot be relegated as an “indispensable footnote,” for, as part of the approximately

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<sup>166</sup> Harvey, Andrew, *Bhagavad Gītā: Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), ix-xi

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, xxv.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, Fowler citing W. Douglas P. Hill, *The Bhagavad-Gīta with English Translation and Commentary* (Laxmi Nagar: Winsome Books India, 2004), 7.

<sup>170</sup> Thompson, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (New York: New York Press, 2008), xxiii.

<sup>171</sup> Feuerstein, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 12.

20,000 *sloka* nucleus, it aides “not only a blow-by-blow account of the conflict between two dynastic contenders but also a spiritual-moral-‘history.’”<sup>172</sup> Therefore, as Feuerstein notes, the “Gita cannot be divorced from the main theme of the epic, which is the Bharata war. . . . it contains, as it were, the spiritual-moral *raison d’etre* for the war.”<sup>173</sup> According to Feuerstein’s view, the purpose of the *Bg*’s existence (*d’etre*) is the “spiritual” purpose of the war books and epic as a whole.

### 1.4.3 The Structure of *The Bhagavadgītā*

Traditionally credited to the scribe Vyāsa, its 700 *ślokas* compose the dialogue between the *kṣatriya* Arjuna and his chariot driver, Kṛṣṇa, the *avatar* of Viṣṇu. Although it is a dialogue, it is almost entirely a one-way conversation. Kṛṣṇa dominates the discourse. Tsoukalas tallies the division as 574 *ślokas* by Kṛṣṇa, 83 by Arjuna, 42 by Sañjaya, and one by Dhṛtarāṣṭra (*Bg* 1.1).<sup>174</sup> Consequently, the following 699 *ślokas* compose the initial answer to his question. Approximately 82% of the dialogue comes from Kṛṣṇa’s defectless mouth, which Tsoukalas notes must be a significant reason its adherents elevate this text from *smṛti* (remembered tradition) to the function of *śruti* (sacred scripture). Its eighteen chapters are a small portion of the expansive *Bharata* epic, the ‘great war,’ located in chapters 23-40 of the *Bhīṣma Parvan*.<sup>175</sup>

The poetic dialogue, loved by masses of devotees and engaged by scholarly interpreters over millennia, became one of three benchmarks for master commentators. Furthermore, Tsoukalas comments that all five traditions of *Vedanta* are indebted to their teacher’s expertise in

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>174</sup> Tsoukalas, Steven, *Bhagavadgītā: Exegetical and Comparative Commentary with Sanskrit Text, Translation, Interlinear Transliteration with Parsing, Mini Lexicon, and Text-Critical Notes*, vol 1 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 7. Tsoukalas goes on to note that the vulgate of 700 verses, most traditionally accepted, is but one version of the text; others comprising from 715 verses to 745. In *Mahābhārata* 6.43.4 (per the count of Robert Minor), Kṛṣṇa is attested 620 verses to Arjuna’s 57, 67 for Sañjaya and one for Dhṛtarāṣṭra. See page 8.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

the *Brahmasutras/Vedantasutras*, the *Upanisads*, and the *Bg*, together forming the “three-fold foundation” (*prasthanatraya*).<sup>176</sup> *Gurus* felt the need to become commentators because of its popularity. Furthermore, its verses are accessible in the time frame of an extended sitting, neither laboriously detailed as the *Mhba* nor cryptic like the *Brahmasutras/Vedantasutras*.<sup>177</sup>

Scholars cannot determine with finitude how many authors should be credited or even the exact dates of composition.<sup>178</sup> Most likely, there were many historical Vyāsas, whose names became a title meaning collector, compiler, or sifter. Vyāsa Dvaipayana is traditionally credited, but there must have been many different collectors, or he would have had to have lived hundreds of years.<sup>179</sup> It is Kṛṣṇa (not to be confused with the *avatar* of Viṣṇu) Vyāsa Dvaipayana that gave Sañjaya the divine vision of the dialogue.<sup>180</sup> Like other epics of the period of composition, the opening chapter includes the key players in the battle so that all later readers may not doubt their participation.<sup>181</sup> It is impossible to know precisely how many men fought in the battle. While tradition places the numbers in the millions, even the numbers that are certainly closer to the actual accounting of combatants are difficult to believe. For instance, there were supposedly eleven divisions for the Kauravas and seven divisions for the Pāṇḍavas (a total of 393,660 chariots; 393,660 elephants; 1,222,980 horses; 1,968,300 infantry).<sup>182</sup>

At the least, the numbers and the massive body counts attributed to the great (semi-divine) heroes convey the magnitude of the role of the actual battle. Hill writes, “It is not possible with

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<sup>176</sup> The term *vedanta* means the “end of the *Vedas*.”

<sup>177</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* Composition could range from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. One Hindu tradition dates the war at Kurukṣetra (an actual plain north of Delhi) from November 22<sup>nd</sup> to December 9<sup>th</sup>, 3139 BCE. See Sreekrishna, Koti and Hari Ravikumar, *The New Bhagavad-Gita* (Mason: W.I.S.E. Words, Inc, 2011).

<sup>179</sup> Feuerstein, George, *The Bhagavad-Gita: A New Translation* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 47.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. See pages 48-51 for a summary of the life of Vyāsa Dvaipayana. .

<sup>181</sup> Thompson, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, xl.

<sup>182</sup> Feuerstein, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 15.

any certainty to separate the legendary from the historical in that great Epic,” even though Hill states later that the text attests to many of the characters in the grand epic narrative.<sup>183</sup> In the end, we have the *Bg* as it is. Over-critiquing, over-spiritualizing, or engaging in an extreme removal of the combat context will “destine one’s conclusion to partiality.”<sup>184</sup>

## 1.5 Ontological Horizon

I end this chapter with a discussion on ontology and how I will use ontology in this thesis. What is a warrior, or in our case, a *kṣatriya*? Rune Henriksen defines a warrior as someone with “a personal and existential commitment to master and experience warfare, who is willing and able both to kill and risk sacrificing his life in combat.”<sup>185</sup> Arjuna displayed a “personal and existential commitment,” but he struggled as a master of arms when he experienced warfare. He struggled to use lethal force at times, though he did not hesitate to “risk sacrificing his life” for his brothers and allies.<sup>186</sup>

Rosen cites Prabhupada’s analogy of a gardener responsible for unplugging harmful plants (e.g., the Kuru leadership). The *kṣatriya* is a “defender, a protector—a person who will resort to physical means to cultivate the field of life. He is not violent; rather, as stated, he protects others from violence. Protecting the innocent is a necessary evil since adverse conditions are an inescapable part of this world.”<sup>187</sup> However, like all wars, there was a steep price. Examples are

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<sup>183</sup> Hill, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 10. At the beginning of the introduction to his translation and commentary, Hill provide evidence for the historicity of the Kṛṣṇa Vasudeva clan and the broader *Mahābhārata* context. See pages 1-24.

<sup>184</sup> Frame, *Moral Injury*, 9.

<sup>185</sup> Henriksen, Rune, “Warriors in combat—What makes people actively fight in combat” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30. no. 2 (April 2007): 187. DOI:10.1080/010402390701248707. (Accessed August 2021). Jared Eaton questions Henriksen’s claims that all soldiers are not warriors based on whether they fire indiscriminately (“spray and pray”) or whether they are able to identify the enemy, sight, and shoot to kill. I agree that men and women may excel at their professions in different situations, however, Henriksen’s litmus is a legitimate factor.

<sup>186</sup> Arjuna is and never was a coward. His hesitation to fight with his full prowess is associated with *mohas* and *śoka*, and his model of order-disorder-order.

<sup>187</sup> Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, *Ibid.*, 30-31.

abundant of how prolonged combat detrimentally impacted entire armies. Long-time friends severed old friendships with the sword, and even Arjuna’s relationship with his older brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, nearly ended in fratricide. As Uzumecki wrote, war changes the warrior through an embodied experience as it changes the “shared (or communal) quality of the self that is endangered by the event of war.”<sup>188</sup>

Concerning ontology, this project is not a comparison of Hindu and Christian thought. Yet, I bring my ontological commitment derived from the *Bg* and, specifically, the work of Steven Tsoukalas.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, I employ Tsoukalas’ ontology of *identity in transcendent and indwelling difference*, a derivative of Rāmānuja’s thought. As previously stated, my focus is Kṛṣṇa’s *guṇa-karma* epistemology that restored (re-ordered) Arjuna to combat readiness, prepared him for combat effectiveness, and grounded him throughout the war. The following ontological texts provide examples of a “two-way conversation,” *a la* Jonathon Shay, Brad Kelle, and Joseph McDonald.<sup>190</sup> Powerful ontological statements appear throughout the *Mhba*, and I will read them

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<sup>188</sup> Gill, D. C., *How We are Changed By War* (Routledge: New York, 2010). Optimal functionality and resilience are not absent to our understanding of combat trauma. British government officials were shocked when contrary to their expectations, research through a technique known as “mass observation” when cross-checked with psychiatric data, discovered that psychological trauma was less reported and psychiatric homes were empty during “The Blitz” of London by the German Luftwaffe.<sup>188</sup> Be it war or natural catastrophe, there is a documented pattern of humans bonding together in a type of temporary social community to overcome their shared struggle. Combat journalist Sebastian Junger reports this in his book, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York: Twelve, 2016), 45, and documents this phenomenon in his experience in Bosnia.

<sup>189</sup> There is much to profit from a comparative study pertaining to Śaṅkara, Mādhva, and Ramanuga’s ontology of the *ātman* and material nature, but such an objective is beyond the boundary of this paper. However, I will provide a brief description for each of the above. I will at times reference Śaṅkara, Madva, and Rāmānuja’s commentary. Tsoukalas compared Śaṅkara’s and Ramanuja’s understanding of the body-divine relationship of the *Kṛṣṇa -avatara* and the Doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in historic Christian Orthodoxy. See Steven Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ: Body-Divine Relation in the Thought of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Classical Christian Orthodoxy* (Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2006). For a *Śaṅkara* ontology, see 71-96; for Rāmānuja’s ontology, see 97-116. For Madhva’s ontology, see B. N. K. Sharma’s *Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991), 51-126; for discussion on the *ātman*, see 253-322, and Surendranath Dasgupta (*A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2011), 150-159.

<sup>190</sup> Doing so is not common in the dominant traditions, and Mcgrath is the notable exception. Scenes from the *Mhba* are pre- and post-late Bronze Age, spanning multiple compilers and religious traditions. His chapters, *Naranārāyaṇau* and *Nārada*, explain the development of the relationship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. I am aware of the dangers of overly theologizing obscure references. This could be a significant reason why interpreters do not use the numerous ontological statements in the epic context. For example, referring to the scene from *Vana Parvan* 3.45.18, he cautions



through the lens of my ontology. Whether or not they are “consciously cast aside” by dominant traditions, it is rare to find such instances significantly informing concepts in the *Bg*.<sup>191</sup> Thus, in the first example, I infer my ontology from *Vana Parvan* 12. Then I allow Arjuna’s response to infuse meaning upon *Bg* 2.9.<sup>192</sup> *Vana Parvan* 12 speaks directly to the relationship of the *ātman*, Arjuna, and Kṛṣṇa *while not retreating from* the context of the swelling *ragas guṇas* of passion as they originate from the combat context of punishing the Kurus and restoring Yudhiṣṭhira’s kingdom.<sup>193</sup> But first, I will set the scene.

### 1.5.1 *Vana Parvan*, XIII: Ontology Precedes Epistemology & Co-Mission

In this scene, the *Mhba* elevates Arjuna’s relationship and purpose. In v3-5, we see an irate Kṛṣṇa (*saṃkruddham*).<sup>194</sup> The Pāṇḍus were exiled to the forest, and the entire entourage is confused when their kin and allies join them “completely possessed with anger” (*krodhāmarśa*

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the reader about theologizing from the reference to how Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa were “formerly *Nara Nārāyaṇau*.” McGrath writes, the theology behind “formerly” is “vague and difficult to reconstruct or to reconstitute,” *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 147. However, in my at-face-value reading, I approach the text as it is as a whole and how I believe the final form *intends* the reader to understand how the “theme of *Naranārāyaṇau* will run through the epic” and “seamlessly joined with the poetry of the warrior culture and the story of a hero and his charioteer friend,” *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 146. Note that McGrath understands the references to the ‘two Kṛṣṇas’ (*dvau kṛṣṇau*) and *naranārāyaṇau* “do not refer to the same mythical characters,” a conclusion based on the former being the product of a “preliterate condition” and the latter being a product of a “literate tradition,” *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 122. Though they be ancient and obscure, their obscurity is not in my mind a strong enough argument against using them, others. The understanding of the *Mhba* is that it is a unified anthology (much like the Old and New Testaments).

<sup>191</sup> I am referencing van Buitenen from 1.4.1. For example, see Dash, Subhasree and Bibhudatta Dash. “Metaphysics of Mokṣa: A Philosophical Anatomy of the Concept of Liberation in the Bhagavad Gītā” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 43, no. 1 (January 2020): 85. (Accessed July 2021). <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/scholarly-journals/metaphysics-mokṣa-philosophical-anatomy-concept>. (Accessed 7-17-21). Dash and Dash begin with a one paragraph overview of the *Mhbn* context of the *Bg*, but then do not employ it in their work. See van Buitenen’s phrase, Ch. 1.4.1. Van Buitenen and Kevin Mcgrath are the notable exceptions and Steven Tsoukalas to a lesser degree. Tsoukalas refers to the background of the epic in a general sense.

<sup>192</sup> Ganguli’s English translation does not always align with the Sanskrit, e.g., the translation is *Vana Parvan* XII, but the Sanskrit is *Vana Parvan* 13.

<sup>193</sup> Though this scene occurs at the beginning of the exile, 13 years prior to Kurukṣetra, the conversation involves their allies coming to their aide, most likely to provide military support: relatives of Pāṇcāla (*pāṇcālasya ca dāyādā*), King Dhṛṣṭaketuś of Cedi, the mighty, world renowned Kekayas brothers (*mahāvīryā bhrātaro lokaviśrutās*). The compound *lokaviśrutās* is the combination of “world” and “hero.” More importantly, Kṛṣṇa’s speech about how he will spill their blood upon the earth.

<sup>194</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, *Vana Parvan* 13.8.

*samanvitās*).<sup>195</sup> They inquired what they should do in response (assumedly, a military response). They all then followed Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) while “reviling the sons of Dhārtarāṣṭra” (*garhayanto dhārtarāṣṭrān*).<sup>196</sup> Finally, they gathered around the “righteous King Yudhiṣṭhira” (*dharmarājam yudhiṣṭhiram*), and having extended courtesies, Vāsudeva pronounced sentence upon the Kurus, specifically those responsible for the usurpation, graphically proclaiming, “the earth will get drunk on their flesh and blood” (*bhūmiḥ pāsyati śoṇitam*).<sup>197</sup>

Observing his swelling anger and perceiving what may be the pre-mature “incineration of all created beings” (*didhākṣantam iva prajāś*),<sup>198</sup> Arjuna effectively neutralized (*śamayām*) Kṛṣṇa by rehearsing his many great deeds from his “prior lives” (*pūrvadeheṣu*).<sup>199</sup> Arjuna’s response worked, and “having spoken” (*uktvā*), Arjuna assumed a posture of silence (*tūṣṇīm*). Arjuna appears to be the one who is in control, and having switched roles as the teacher, he returned to his role as a devotee, silencing himself. However, this interchange will not be the last scene where he silences himself. He will again “become quiet” after his *Bg* crisis, “having spoken” his arguments (*uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva*, cf. *Bg* 2.9). Whereas *Bg* 2.9 is a response of a struggling *kṣatriya* having been dominated but not defeated by the *guṇas* of passion and darkness, having given his reasoned apologetic *against* Kṛṣṇa, *Vana* 12.37 is the opposite. Having responded to the *guṇas* of truth, he accurately recalled Kṛṣṇa’s unique ontology, quieting himself while under control (cf.

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<sup>195</sup> In the *Mhba*, the adj. *samanvitāḥ* can mean “possessed by” or “consumed,” See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1155.

<sup>196</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Vana Parvan* 13.3. Cf. *Bg* 1.20 for *dhārtarāṣṭrān*. Arjuna will later see these sons/host which will propel him to his crisis.

<sup>197</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata Vana Parvan* 13.5; *duryodhanasya karṇaśya śakuneś ca durātmanas duḥśāsanah. Śakune* is *durātmanas*, “evil-atman,” “evil natured.” For *durātmanas*, see √*dur*, Monier-Williams, 484. *Pāsyati* is the future tense of √*pā*; see Monier Williams, 612.

<sup>198</sup> See Monier-Williams, 658.

<sup>199</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Vana Parvan* 13.7. For discussion on *dehe* in *Bg*, 2.13, 30; 8.2, 4; 11.7, 15; 13.22, 31; 14.5, 11; 16.18. I take the antecedent to be Kṛṣṇa, not the great deeds of Arjuna’s prior lives. The following focus is on Kṛṣṇa.

*sthirmatis* in Ch. 1.3.1). At this point, Kṛṣṇa appeared to be restored to a calm state, expressing his affection for his dear friend.

Seeing him in a respectful posture, Kṛṣṇa began elaborating upon *their* unique relationship (shared ontological origins, v37-40). Arjuna restrained Kṛṣṇa’s anger by recalling Kṛṣṇa’s ontology (who he is, what he did). Kṛṣṇa encouraged, assured, and enabled Arjuna to arise from a devotee posture by rehearsing Arjuna’s origin and shared relationship (ontology). Whether or not Kṛṣṇa *needed* restoration to a calm state is a different question. As the defectless supreme deity, he is not capable of *a-dharma*. He is *akartāram avyayam*, the “eternal non-doer (Bg 4.13; cf. 3.22-24), and *karmāṇi nibadhnanti*, “actions do not bind him” (Bg 9.9).<sup>200</sup> Yet, there are several instances when Arjuna must intervene *because* Kṛṣṇa *appears* to require intervention to prevent violating *his* pre-war vow.<sup>201</sup> Perhaps, the appearance of being overcome by the *guṇas* was simply a matter of their inability to fully “recognize” him *by way of* their material nature, comprised of the three *guṇas*.<sup>202</sup> His response was appropriate then and will be again thirteen years later on the plains of Kurukṣetra. The narrator continues to refer to Arjuna as *ātmā kṛṣṇasya*, “the soul of Kṛṣṇa.”<sup>203</sup> Continuing, Kṛṣṇa’s responds with a deeply ontological statement. *Vana Parvann* 12.37-40 explains,

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<sup>200</sup> The verb *nibadhnanti* is a pr. indic. act 3p from *ni* + *√badh* implying a continually eternal state of being. *Bg* 9.9 refers to v7-8 and the endless cycle of the material nature (sentient/non-sentient) returning to Kṛṣṇa at the dissolution of the universe only to come forth from Kṛṣṇa in creation.

<sup>201</sup> Latter examples regard his pre-war promise to remain a noncombatant in the war. One of the saddest moments in the epic was the breaking of the news of the death of Abhymanyu, Arjuna’s son, which also compelled Kṛṣṇa to mourn.

<sup>202</sup> In *Bg* 7.12-13, Kṛṣṇa commands Arjuna to “know” or “learn” (*viddhi*, v12) how the three possible *guṇa*-states of being which come forth from him (while he remains transcendent and different from them). Humanity “does not perceive him” because of all that is the material nature of the universe is “confused/diluted.” (*mohitaṃ nābhijānāti*).

<sup>203</sup> *Kṛṣṇasya*, is an ablative of source. I do not think the narrator is speaking ontologically when he refers to Arjuna as *ātmā kṛṣṇasya*. In this instance, I take it to be a term of endearment signifying their unique relationship. Similar, to one who may now say, “She is my soul-mate.” However, this may not be the case. When Kṛṣṇa refers to Arjuna, “you are from me,” he is most definitely expounding ontologically. See also Mcgrath *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 124, who references this scene in his early development of their identity as Nara and Nārāyaṇa.

- (38) *mamaiva tvam tavaivāhaṃ ye madīyās tavaiva te  
yas tvām dveṣṭi sa mām dveṣṭi yas tvām anu sa mām anu*
- (39) *naras tvam asi durdharṣa harir nārāyaṇo hy aham  
lokāl lokam imaṃ praptau naranārāyaṇāv ṛṣī*
- (40) *ananyaḥ pārtha mattas tvam ahaṃ tvattaś ca bhārata  
nāvayor antaraṃ śakyaṃ vedituṃ bharatarṣabha*
- (41) *tasmin vīra samāvāye<sup>204</sup>*

- (38) You are mine and I am yours. All that belongs to me is yours.  
He who hates you hates me. Whoever is following you is following after me.
- (39) You are Nara, the unshakeable one; truly, I am Hari, Nārāyaṇa.  
The two of us are *Nara and Nārāyaṇa*. We are both Rṣīs, ‘born’ of this world
- (40) For a unique [dual] mission. Partha, I am from you and you are from me,
- (41) Bharata. Regarding us, Bharatarṣabha, no person in this world can know the  
inseparable difference between us.<sup>205</sup>

In the above quote, ontology (“you are mine”) precedes *dharma* co-mission (“unique [dual] purpose”). I draw the following inferences. First, the *Mhba* identifies Arjuna’s distinct identity within their shared relationship (*mamaiva tvam tavaivāhaṃ*). Secondly, Arjuna’s origin is from Kṛṣṇa yet different from Kṛṣṇa’s identity (*mattas tvam ahaṃ tvattaś ca*). Thirdly, Arjuna has a unique dual *dharma* co-mission with and for Kṛṣṇa (*lokam imaṃ praptau*) in so far as he is part of creation (*lokāl*). Fourthly, the mystery of Kṛṣṇa’s identity as the eternally transcendent lord (*harir nārāyaṇo hy aham, naranārāyaṇāv*) is the ultimate predicate of Arjuna’s life and co-

<sup>204</sup> Monier-Monier, 77. The verb *dveṣṭi* is a pr. ind. 3ps of √*dviṣ*. The reality [indicative] is that people hate Arjuna. I translate the adjective *durdharṣa* as “unshakeable.” Its broader semantic range in the *Mhba* can be rendered “unconquerable, difficult to attack.” I opt for “unshakeable” because it contrasts Arjuna’s trembling in the *Bg* and the many occurrences of losing bodily control in the war to come. See Monier-Williams, 1225. For *ananyas*, see Monier-Williams, 25. *Mattas* is likely an ablative of source, hence, “you are from me.” It is used when making a distinction and in cases of familial relationships. For *antaraṃ*, cf. *Bg* 11.20, 13.34. The latter refers to knowing difference between the “[battle] field” and the “Field Knower.” Also related, cf. *vedituṃ* with *Bg* 13.1; 18.1. For stylistic reasons, I infer “purpose” (Ganguli) in my choice of ‘mission.’ The context clearly supports a *co-mission*.

<sup>205</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Vana Parvan*, X-XII. See also, LI, whereby the mutual relationship is set in the combat-context of co-mission: Kṛṣṇa is the soul of Arjuna, Arjuna is the soul of Kṛṣṇa. Dutt’s translation is near identical. , Sharma, Ishvar Chandra and O. N. Bimali, eds., M. N. Dutt, *Mahābhārata* (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2013), vol. 2, *Droṇa Parvan*, 39.

mission. Fifthly, their mysterious relationship implies *difference* though it appears to be indifferent (*samāvāye*) to “the world of men” (*lokāl*).

In an ontology of ‘identity in transcendent and indwelling difference,’ I understand Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna’s relationship in the following way. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna (Partha), *mattas tvam*, “you are from me.” The ablative of source connotes Arjuna’s origin. He comes from Kṛṣṇa.<sup>206</sup> But Kṛṣṇa continues, “I am from you.” I infer this passage illustrates how Kṛṣṇa is transcendent yet simultaneously indwelling Arjuna in distinction. In addition, the ablative case carries with it a sense of distinction. Arjuna is *in* Kṛṣṇa *in so far as* he is part of creation whose existence depends *upon* Kṛṣṇa. All of the creation returns to and proceeds out from Kṛṣṇa, who indwells creation with a transcendent difference as the “lord of lords” (*deveśa*) eternally over creation.<sup>207</sup> In *Bg* 11.10, Arjuna is ‘in’ Kṛṣṇa in so far as he is part of creation seen as the “form of the universe” (*viśvarūpa; rūpamaiśvara*).<sup>208</sup> In addition, it appears to be Kṛṣṇa’s mutual relationship (ontology) that restores Arjuna to his wits. Thus, ontology plays a central role in the shared purpose of the two Kṛṣṇas. From the example, the rehearsal of Kṛṣṇa’s identity and deeds restores him to the point that he can remind Arjuna of the unique role of their shared vision.

### 1.5.2 *Sabha Parvan, III: Nara and Nārāyaṇa with Sthānu*

Unlike any other duo, their origin is joined inextricably to their “uniquely dual mission.”<sup>209</sup>

McGrath goes into great detail to trace the development of the theme of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as the

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<sup>206</sup> Whitney, William Dwight, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, including Both The Classical Language, and the Older Dialects, of Veda and Brahmana (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1891), 96.

<sup>207</sup> See Tsoukalas, Steven, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 4, 219-222.

<sup>208</sup> See notes on *Bg* 10.20 in Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 4, 76. Tsoukalas takes the locative *dehe* as a locative of reference to Kṛṣṇa’s body. It implies that Arjuna’s combat trauma is not ultimately an illusion of his lord’s body, but, as Tsouklas states, the locative “designates a phenomenon (the body) in which an event (the vision) takes place.” See also, vol. 4., 163. For options for the locative case, see Whitney, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, 10.

<sup>209</sup> Hence forward, I will use ‘co-mission.’

‘Two Kṛṣṇas,’ Nara and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>210</sup> McGrath focuses on Arjuna’s dual nature, for, unlike any other character, “he always represents two conditions both uniquely and simultaneously.”<sup>211</sup> This scene is the moment in the *Mhba* that the theme of Nara and Nārāyaṇa emerges as a consistent reference to the two beings, unified in a relationship and what would be their co-mission.<sup>212</sup> This unique relationship will only strengthen in the war but will fade after the war in the absence of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>213</sup> One more scene is pertinent to this discussion.

The setting of *Sabha Parvan* III is the conclusion of the Pāṇḍavā’s commissioning Maya Danada to build them the most glorious palace in the world.<sup>214</sup> Maya leaves, but not after promising a mighty club to Bhīma and a Conch Shell (Devadatta) to Arjuna.<sup>215</sup> On his journey, he reaches a beautiful lake (Vindu) on the slopes of the bejeweled peak, Hiranya-sringa, in the Mainaka mountain range. The scene now turns to a description of Indra’s 100 sacrifices.<sup>216</sup> Having completed the offerings, Indra is rewarded for his acts of worship. Next, the story shifts to Mahadeva, who made that place of sacrifice his home after he created the worlds of the universe. Thousands of spirits worshiped the “great god” Mahadeva in that abode. Five gods are separated from the others, Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Brahma, Yama, and Sthānu, “the fifth” (*pañcamas*).<sup>217</sup> They

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<sup>210</sup> McGrath, Kevin, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*.

<sup>211</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 45.

<sup>212</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 126. The term, ‘co-mission,’ is my inference (v40). Ganguli’s translation does not align with the Sanskrit text. Ganguli’s translation (*Vana Parvan*, XII, 28, is “thou subsequently becamest Hari”) does not contain Nārāyaṇa, but the Sanskrit does, *sa tvaṃ nārāyaṇo bhūtvā harir āsī* (See Poonal Critical Translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, 3,13,19). He does insert Nārāyaṇa near the end of p29, but the Sanskrit does not contain Nārāyaṇa after the v37-40. Admittedly, this is a frustrating obstacle to using Ganguli. See McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 126.

<sup>213</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 111-114. McGrath notes that the post-war Arjuna drops *Gāṇḍiva* (his celestially gifted weapon from Indra) for the first time in combat with the Trigartas. McGrath provides two possible reasons, one being grief, the other being the lack of Kṛṣṇa’s presence (111). I consider this post-war scene to be a causal contrast to *Bg* 1.47 where Arjuna *visṛjya saśaram cāpaṃ*, “cast down his bow and arrow” as a result of a “heart overcome by sorrow” (*śokasaṃvignamānasas*). This contrast will be referenced again in Ch. 5.2 and Ch 10.1.3.

<sup>214</sup> *Sabha Parvan*, III, 4.

<sup>215</sup> Devadatta was previously owned by Varuna. Cf. *Bg* 1.15. Arjuna blew Devadatta as their forces responded to the Kuru’s conches.

<sup>216</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, Sabha Parvan*, III, 5.

<sup>217</sup> Ganguli, *Sabha Parvan* 3.13. *pañcamas* refers to the “fifth part,” but also the five parts of the body. The text is placing Sthānu as the fifth member of the illustrious five.

offer their worship at the end of a thousand *yugas*. The point is this. Because of the epic as a whole, Arjuna is Nara and Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa, but they are also associated with but distinct from Sthānu. The dualistic theme will be picked up later (Chs. 8-9), but it sets a precedent that Sthānu has been with but distinct from Arjuna from time immemorial. In other words, the transcending ontological theme of the epic is not only that of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. Alongside this relationship is the transcending association of Arjuna with Kṛṣṇa, with but distinct from Sthānu. As we will see in Chs. 8-9, the being of Sthānu (ontology) will play a key role in Kṛṣṇa’s restorative *guṇa-karma* epistemology.

### 1.5.3 *Vana Parvan*, XXXVIII: Arjuna is Unknowingly Tested by Śaṅkara

In *Vana Parvan*, XXXVIII, Vāyasa fast-forwards to the narration of the *Mhba* at the request of Arjuna’s grandson, King Janamejaya.<sup>218</sup> He recounts the feats in the forest and the epic battles by which he received his celestial weapons.<sup>219</sup> Especially significant to this thesis is that Sthānu is the ‘Bestower.’<sup>220</sup> Arjuna’s quest to gain the divine weapons begins with a trial whereby the supreme god, Hara/Śaṅkara, takes on the form/disguise of a local *kirāta*, one of the indigenous people of the forested, mountainous region.<sup>221</sup> However, a shape-shifting *rākṣasa* (demon) took the form of a *muka* (boar) and sought a confrontation. Hara/Śaṅkara, incognito, advised Arjuna to disengage, but Arjuna disregarded his request *and then loosed Gāṇḍīva*. At that moment, Hara/Śaṅkara loosed his bow whereby the *muka* was slain, returning to its original form of a *rākṣasa*. Arjuna is offended, for it appeared that a common *kirata* had broken the etiquette for

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<sup>218</sup> It can be assumed that Vāyasa’s retelling was heard by *kṣatriyas* other than Janamejaya. It is plausible to assume the epic functioned in a healing manner to some in the audience.

<sup>219</sup> Ganguli, *Vana Parvan*, XXXVIII.

<sup>220</sup> This is a detailed story of significant length. Therefore, there is much to glean beyond my focus upon Sthānu’s role in Arjuna’s trial. See also Ganguli, *Vana Parvan*, XXXIV-CVVII.

<sup>221</sup> Ganguli, *Vana Parvan*, XXXIX.

hunting.<sup>222</sup> Arjuna protests, explaining that he will kill him for his interference. Unknown to Arjuna, it was not Gāṇḍīva who slew the boar. It may have looked that way to him and the thousands of female onlookers who descended with Hara/Śaṅkara's train, but not all is as it appears. Hara/Śaṅkara quickly corrected Arjuna that it was his arrow that struck first, felling the boar. Therefore, he is the cause of death. He then baits Arjuna to a duel.

Before we move on, I make several points. First, Arjuna misperceives the encounter with Hara/Śaṅkara. He does not recognize the boar as a dangerous *rākṣasa*. He fails to perceive the true identity of the *kirata*. Based on his misperception, he fails to see that the Hara/Śaṅkara's arrows struck first. Motivated by the swell of the *rajas guṇa*, anger, he makes the wrong decision in attacking who he misperceived to be a commoner. In what may be foreshadowing, thirteen years before the scene of his crisis, the *Mhba* provides an account of the same process as seen in *Bg* 1: misperception, ill reasoning, and passion-driven action, all in the presence of the supreme being. There is more to come.

Hara/Śaṅkara's plan worked. Now enraged, Arjuna engaged the *kirata* with all his might but slowly questioned who was successfully rebuffing his attacks. Eventually, Arjuna became utterly exhausted, whereby he realized that he had been fighting the supreme Mahadeva, also known as Hara/Śaṅkara, Śivā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, and Bhava. With great repentance, he confessed his rash acts were due to ignorance.<sup>223</sup> Mahadeva forgave him and received his worship.<sup>224</sup>

This scene becomes significant, for the *Mhba* later identifies Sthānu at the beginning of Arjuna's training and later in combat. In *Varna Parvan*, XLIX, Sañjaya reaffirms the doom of the

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<sup>222</sup> Albeit, he is radiating like the sun. See *Varna Parvan*, XL, for the appellation of Bhava.

<sup>223</sup> The fight moves to hand to hand combat (wrestling) after Hara/Śaṅkara disarms Arjuna.

<sup>224</sup> This is one of the few instances in the *Mhba* that account a devotee creating an idol as part of their worship.



Kurus by the hands of Arjuna, who had wrestled Sthānu (and survived).<sup>225</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira was later encouraged to hear that Arjuna had pleased Sthānu with the commitment and prowess of his combat.<sup>226</sup> Later in the war, Yudhiṣṭhira’s confidence is well-founded, for after Arjuna had proved his singular greatness in the heavenly battle on behalf of Indra, the king of *devas* declared, “in battle you shall always remain calm, and discharge the weapons unerringly.”<sup>227</sup>

#### **1.5.4 Varna Parvan, XL-XLIX: Arjuna Receives Celestial Weapons**

Remembering the scene of his crisis in *Bg* 1, it was not the first time Arjuna sat on his chariot in the position of a pupil/devotee asking to be “corrected” (*śādi*). In a scene following his combat with Hara/Śaṅkara, Arjuna reiterated his pre-war commitment by requesting Bhava to arm him with the weapons capable of defeating Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karna, and Kripa, *et al.*<sup>228</sup> Hearing this, Bhava gifted him the weapon of Śiva, the irresistible *Pāśupatāstra*.<sup>229</sup> Receiving this, Arjuna immediately assumed the role of a devotee/disciple and requested, “instruct me.”<sup>230</sup> He continued to marvel at the episode, boasting in confidence that he had already defeated his enemies because he had seen and touched the supreme form of ‘God’ (Bhava). Thus, the theme of Arjuna’s ordained victory was in the context of divine arming. He received these weapons *because* the ‘gods’ were pleased by how he fought Hara/Śaṅkara *while not knowing his true identity*.<sup>231</sup> This scene foreshadows his future role as Kṛṣṇa’s agent of death (*Bg* 11.33). His performance on that day

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<sup>225</sup> In addition, Sthānu is identified in equal status with Indra, both being alternative references to Madheva (see *Adhi Parvan*, CXXIII). In addition, he is referenced as exceedingly meritorious in *Adhi Parvan*, III.

<sup>226</sup> See Ganguli, *Vana Parvan*, CLXXIII.

<sup>227</sup> Ganguli, *Vana Parvan*, CLXXII.

<sup>228</sup> Ganguil, *Varna Parvan*, XL.

<sup>229</sup> He returns Gāṇḍīva and gifts several quivers which will supernaturally remain full of arrows.

<sup>230</sup> Ganguli, *Varna Parvan*, XL. Ganguli’s translation.

<sup>231</sup> For example, In *Varna Parvan*, XLI, he meets gods like Varuṇa, the god of the waters, whom being pleased then gifts his celestial noose; Kubera, the god of wealth, gifts *antardhāna*; Yama, the god of death, gifts his mace. Receiving these, Bhava/ Sthānu instructs Arjuna that he has yet to complete his request, for he must ascend to heaven where he will receive all of his weapons.

became the means of promised victory in the coming war. Therefore, he will conquer all if he fights at Kurukṣetra like he fought that day in the forest.

### **1.5.5 Droṇa Parvan, CXLVII-CXLVIII: Arjuna’s Re-commitment Restores Yudhiṣṭhira**

In one last example, *Droṇa Parvan* CXLVII-CXLVIII speaks of a reciprocal relationship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Karna, victory and defeat.<sup>232</sup> It began with Bhīma bemoaning his embarrassing loss at the hands of Karna, but especially Karna’s cruel words insulting his manhood and deriding his discipline, warcraft, and stamina in combat.<sup>233</sup> Bhīma and Arjuna had vowed to slay Karna. All seemed lost until Bhīma aroused his brother to join him and together fulfill their vow. Implied, though, is that victory was only possible *because* Arjuna joined his brother. Arjuna assures the vow will be fulfilled and then chastens Karna’s un-*kṣatriya*-like braggadocious comments following a well-matched, sanctioned duel. Arjuna then vows to kill Droṇa’s son, Jayadratha, because of his unlawful killing of his son, Abhīmanyu. At this moment, Kṛṣṇa enters the scene as the chariot driver and quickly assures Arjuna.

At this juncture, Kṛṣṇa declares he will laud Arjuna’s upcoming victory, but as soon as he does, Arjuna defers all credit to the grace of Kṛṣṇa and the well-known truth that where there is Kṛṣṇa with Arjuna, there is certain victory. After these exchanges that convey a sense of mutual love and kindness, Kṛṣṇa smiled and led Arjuna to a vantage so that Arjuna may behold the vast battlefield of carnage. Arjuna had earlier requested the knowledge of the “field” and the “Field Knower” (see *Bg* 13.2ff).<sup>234</sup> With the *Bg* long behind him, Kṛṣṇa, The Field Knower (*kṣetrajñam*), makes a practical application to the battlefield.<sup>235</sup> Having rightly perceived and understood the battlefield, Arjuna repaired to his brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, with the glad tidings of Jayadratha’s

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<sup>232</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVII-CXLVIII, 329-333.

<sup>233</sup> Karna calls Bhīma a eunuch.

<sup>234</sup> *ca kṣetram kṣetrajñam*

<sup>235</sup> Hence, I translate *kṣetrajñam* as “battle field” in *Bg* 13.

slaying.<sup>236</sup> By Kṛṣṇa’s direction, Arjuna is rightly “seeing” (perceiving/understanding) the battlefield for what it is—a place of extreme violence and carnage of which he is an inextricable agent of death. Others (and their *dharma*) rely upon his perception and reasoning in combat.

As the scene ends, Yudhistira is overwhelmed with tears of joy and celebrates both, especially Kṛṣṇa. Next, he transitioned to a long ontological recitation and worship of Kṛṣṇa’s primal existence. Then he makes a connection to the reciprocal relationship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, “He, again, that is a friend of Dhananjaya [Arjuna] or is engaged in Dhananjaya’s good, obtaineth thee that art the preceptor of Dhananjaya [Kṛṣṇa] and attaineth to happiness.”<sup>237</sup> Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa then focus on Yudhiṣṭhira, exclaiming that his wrath and kingly dutifulness defeated his greatest enemies. Finally, the scene ends tenderly with Bhīma and Sātyaki returning from battle, impaled by numerous arrows. Nevertheless, they saluted their brother, sat, and joined in hand as the king heaped praises upon them.

## Summary

This chapter examined five horizons: comparative, phenomenological, textual, historical, and ontological. These five horizons all play a part in understanding Kṛṣṇa’s ontologically substantiated *guṇa-karma* epistemology. The Bg’s theological “particularities” and authority bring a distinctively Hindu perspective to ECTL. I strike a balance between approaching the Bg in its historical combat context and clear examples of symbolism (e.g., Arjuna sitting/ Kṛṣṇa’s commands to stand up). For example, commentators often interpret the fighting as symbolism for a war raging in the hearts of all humans. However, the graphic portrayals of physical carnage and nonphysical trauma can connect to contemporary warriors who may suffer from one or both. They

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<sup>236</sup> In the sense that his death is assured.

<sup>237</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVIII, 334.

may be drawn to the epic by their imagination and connect what they read with what they remember from their combat service.

The textual horizon exegetically grounds this project in the primary and secondary sources and the combat context. Though one may contest the historicity of the war, the lack of evidence is not a death blow, for the epic assumes historicity. Ultimately, we have what we have and must manage with what we have. Finally, I spent considerable time presenting examples of how ontology substantiated perception, reason, and actions. More than one of these passages foreshadows the *Bg* and the war. Unlike other commentaries, I give more weight to interpreting passages from the *Mhba* through the lens of my ‘*gītology*’ (e.g., *Varna Parvan XII*). Likewise, I substantially inform my *gītology* through the ontological passages from the epic context. There are profound speeches, and because I view the entire epic as a unified message, I can probe for new meaning in the *Bg* and the epic.

**Part 1:**  
**Literature Review**

## Chapter 2

# A Critical Reading of Emerging Combat Trauma Literature and ‘Soul Wound’

### Introduction

What is the direction of ECTL?<sup>238</sup> This chapter responds to that question by examining the significant issues and contributors who have pioneered and guided ECTL.<sup>239</sup> In the following sections, I share the evolution of how thinking about nonphysical trauma/wounding emerged from the dominant paradigm, PTSD. Next, I examine critical thinkers in the field, e.g., Brett Litz, Edward Tick, Larry Kent Graham, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Jonathon Shay.

As a field of study, psychology has dominated thinking about the invisible impact of combat since the mid-twentieth century. Jonathon Shay challenged the paradigm preferring “psychological injury” over Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>240</sup> Unless in the case of a specific reference, I will use the term ‘nonphysical trauma.’<sup>241</sup> Scholars in the field have seen an organic interest in moral, ontological, and theological categories.<sup>242</sup> Concepts like ‘soul wound,’

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<sup>238</sup> For example, see Robert Emmet Meagher and Douglas A. Pryer’s anthology, *War and Moral Injury* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018). Emerging combat trauma literature originates from practical psychology and theology. Many of those who contribute to this field of study have a connection to combat trauma, be it a family member (e.g., Rita Nakashima Brock) or are themselves veterans (see introduction to contributors, xiii-xxii).

<sup>239</sup> By the end of the chapter, my focus will be directed to the term ‘soul wound,’ and the like.

<sup>240</sup> Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 4. He conceded that the term PTSD is here to stay, so he compromises with “Combat PTSD.”

<sup>241</sup> I want to avoid getting bogged down in a debate between whether this phenomenon is a soul wound or a moral injury. It is not uncommon to find a book on moral injury that also describes moral injury as a soul wound.

<sup>242</sup> I use ‘theological’ to include other disciplines such as ontology or spirituality. Whereas the acronym, PTSD, has dominated the field of study becoming a ‘catch all’ phrase, my use of ‘theology’ does not absorb other disciplines, including psychology. In the former model, generally speaking, all observed traumas are a form of PTSD or some type of stress related trauma, to include non-physical. However, I infer the term itself is limited in nature, as compared to ‘theological,’ which may include disciplines such as ontology. I no longer use the term, ‘evolving combat-trauma literature,’ for the nature of the word, ‘evolve,’ suggests the former model has become something new, i.e., PTSD studies have become moral injury or invisible wounding studies. Instead, I opt for ‘tangential because while I (others) read the same literature from a theological perspective, I recognize the value of psychology and psychiatry, disciplines that continue to contribute to research. That said, there is much with other perspectives like ontology, spirituality, soteriology, eschatology, and philosophy.

‘moral injury,’ and ‘invisible wound’ are firmly established but have not become definitively canonized in the literature. There is internal debate as to the meaning of terms and definitions. However, what *is* canonized is the agreement upon the reality of a type of nonphysical, invisible wound that significantly impacts human life in ways that *cannot* be adequately articulated by the over-generalized construct of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Therefore, we must look closely at the meaning and implications of the soul language in ECTL. Without clarity, there will be an ambiguous, grossly overgeneralized, vacant term with little lexical restraint.

## 2.1 Afterwar

Nancy Sherman coined the term *afterwar* to describe the lingering impact of combat trauma. In the foreword of Sherman’s book, Lieutenant General James M. Dubik touched on the nature of combat to flip worldviews. He writes, “War is the realm of the paradoxical: the morally repugnant *is* the morally permissible, and even the morally necessary.”<sup>243</sup> Dubik finds the catalyst for moral “dissonance” to be the difference between expectations of combat and direct actions in war.<sup>244</sup> The expectations of ensuing actions cause non-physical wounds, but direct participation causes the most catastrophic wounding. ECTL recognizes the long-term afterwar trauma to the human integration of mind, body, and soul. The phenomenology of combat deconstructs the “structural dimensions,” the “architecture of the self,”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Sherman, Nancy, *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiv. The concept of a ‘moral injury’ will be addressed later in the section.

<sup>244</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, xv. The term ‘moral injury’ will be addressed in Ch 2. Furthermore, we find examples of how witnessing the violent, gory acts of war impact observers. For example, Dhṛtarāṣṭra cannot escape the trauma of Sañjaya’s narration, but his trauma manifests differently than the men who retreat in the face of certain death, or who become enraged to the level of a berserker, or who were exhausted to the point of collapse, or willing to commit *adharmā* acts.

<sup>245</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality*. 9.

A warrior's participation is a significant factor in understanding nonphysical wounding. What one does in the body changes a warrior's outlook on life because their actions profoundly impact their capacity to perceive reality and reason their next right move. It changes warriors' perception of themselves and their ability to trust others, be they strangers, friends, or family members. John P. Wilson writes of extreme cases in *The Posttraumatic Self*, explaining that the "entire infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented with a new design."<sup>246</sup> Wilson's term, "rearranged," implies that combat can *disarrange* a warrior's firmly established perception of reality. Their pre-war perception of what is right and good is *disordered*, for the "morally repugnant is the morally permissible, and even the morally necessary."<sup>247</sup> Therefore, Wilson implies that their perception must be *re-ordered* after combat so that the warrior may make sense of his actions in war.

Norma Wikler concluded that there is a vast difference in "self-conception" between the warrior as "witness" and the warrior as "agent." From the perspective of the post-combat trauma of The Vietnam War, Wikler writes that it is in the "doing," the execution of the killing act, that American Vietnam veterans "experienced the deeper dissonance." The realization of deriving joy, satisfaction, and an increased longing to kill became an "exciting game," marking those in whom the deepest dissonance occurred.<sup>248</sup> Many warriors are never completely confident they killed anyone despite the number of bullets discharged from their weapons. Brian Powers writes in *Full Darkness*, "we cannot participate in the force of violence in a way that is not deeply distorting and corrosive to our very being."<sup>249</sup> Charles Anderson discloses, "In killing the grunts of North

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<sup>246</sup> Wilson, John P., ed., *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality*, 9.

<sup>247</sup> Sherman, Nancy, *Afterwar*, xv.

<sup>248</sup> Wikler, Norma, "Hidden Injuries of War," 95-99, in Charles R. Figley, and Seymour Leventman, eds., *Strangers At Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1980).

<sup>249</sup> Powers, Brian S, *Full Darkness: Original Sin, Moral Injury, and Wartime Violence* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 39.



Vietnam, the grunts of America had killed a part of themselves.”<sup>250</sup> In another example of how participation in the violent, gory actions of combat impact the perception and reason, Brian Castner poignantly shares the personal experience of his damaged *afterwar* brain,

I died in Iraq. The old me left for Iraq and never came home.... If I didn't die, I don't know what else to call it.... The new me has a blown-up Swiss-cheese brain, and doesn't remember all of the old me. But he remembers enough. Enough to be ashamed. Enough to miss the old me. Enough to resent the old me. Resent the way everyone mourns him, while I am standing right in front of them.... When you go to war, and die, and come home Crazy and with a ragged brain, you get to watch your family carry on without you. Everyone longs for the old me. No one in particular [sic] wants to be with the new me. Especially me.<sup>251</sup>

Returning to Power's description of the corrosive nature of combat in *Full Darkness*, it is impossible to commit violence upon another human being and not, to some degree, be traumatized. It may or may not be a physical distortion. Still, the aftermath will always be a nonphysical distortion to the foundations of a warrior's ability to understand reality and act accordingly. I liken it to a form of interference that breaks up a clear signal for communication. Castner's quote highlights a critical issue in ECTL; what do we call this other type of wound that is not the fear-based construct of PTSD, causing veterans to describe themselves as dead?

## 2.2 Afterwar Violence & Suicide

James D. Johnson, in *Combat Trauma*, recounts the stories of sixteen veterans over 40 years after Vietnam. They describe their trauma as a hole in their soul—an exhausted soul. Johnson wrote, “Much of life is massacred as a result of the violence of combat, which has sent deep roots

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<sup>250</sup> Holmes, Richard, *Acts of War, The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 376, 393

<sup>251</sup> Castner, Brian, *The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life that Follows* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 157-158. Castner describes his current afterwar life as “The Crazy,” connecting the emotional, psychological, phenomena of what may now be called invisible wounding to the destructive blast waves ripping through the brain in the vicinity of an explosion.

into our hearts.”<sup>252</sup> Wilson describes the assault in the following way, “in varying degrees, the psychological trauma ‘rattles’ the organism and disturbs the equilibrium of the self.”<sup>253</sup>

In the recent past, clinicians broadly applied the PTSD paradigm to many life-threatening situations. Yet, there are positive characteristics of post-combat trauma, and the paradigm does not capture the entire experience. Maguen and company found that in a nationally representative sample of American Vietnam vets, “Killing was associated with PTSD symptoms, peritraumatic dissociation, functional impairment, and violent behaviors.”<sup>254</sup> As a result of these lasting symptoms, some researchers have attempted to link a tendency in veterans toward increased violent crime. Still, it is not representative of most veterans suffering from postcombat trauma.<sup>255</sup> According to historian Joanna Bourke, there is a repeated public hysteria concerning the trained killers returning home (the War on Terror), also seen post World War I, II, Korean War, and the Vietnam War.<sup>256</sup> However, many veterans experience Post Combat Trauma Growth (PTCG). On account of their PTCG, combat veterans make innumerable positive contributions to society, e.g., public education, law enforcement, politics, and energy. Many will learn to cope with their

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<sup>252</sup> Johnson, James D., *Combat Trauma: A Personal Look at Long-Term Consequences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2010), 14.

<sup>253</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 11.

<sup>254</sup> Maguen, Shira, Thomas J. Metzler, , Brett T. Litz, Karen H., Knight, Sara J., Marmar, Charles R., “The Impact of Killing in War on Mental Health Symptoms and Related Functioning,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, no. 5 (October 2009): 435-443. DOI: 10.1002/JTS.20451. Accessed August 2021).

<sup>255</sup> For example, Wilson, John P., Sheldon D. Zigelbaum, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Disposition to Criminal Behavior,” in *Trauma and It’s Wake: Traumatic Stress Theory, Research, and Intervention*, ed. Charles R. Figley, Jr. (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986).

<sup>256</sup> Bourke, Joanna, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (Washington: Basic Books, 1999), ch. 11, “Return to Civilian Life,” 334ff. Bourke uses a phrase, the “beast within” to describe the reality of a soldiers training and the rage that can accompany his or her long-term psycho-socio wounding, and the fearful perceptions of civilians toward veterans over the decades. Glimpses of it are alive today in modern American politics with the attempted restrictions of Second Amendment “gun rights” of Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans.

experiences, while those who welcome them learn to adjust to change.<sup>257</sup> Tragically, the cost of war may be highest among the men and women who do return.

For example, between 2010 and 2020, over 60,000 U.S. veterans committed suicide—surpassing the count of KIAs from nearly 20 years of involvement in the Vietnam War (1955-1973).<sup>258</sup> Sean Levine argued that the popularized “22 a day” phrase, which has dramatically enhanced awareness in the U.S. public, is misleading because the trend has increased yearly since 2016.<sup>259</sup> As many veterans reflect upon the orders and actions of their duty, Brock and Lettini write, “As every veteran of combat knows, the ideal of war service, the glamour of its heroics, and the training for killing fail to prepare warriors for its true horrors and moral atrocities.”<sup>260</sup> Brock and Lettini write, “many soldiers acknowledge something deep changes in them.”<sup>261</sup> The goal is ‘soul repair,’ and Brock and Lettini summarize their understanding of soul repair as an intersection of hope and integrity. They write that soul repair is “how we hold on to our own humanity” while simultaneously acknowledging the “unbearable truths” of dark depths of how war changes us to be the kind of people we never thought possible. It is the process of “remembering” who one has become because of their actions so that we may “reweave our moral fiber.”<sup>262</sup> What is that change that unbraids our external and self-perception? What is it called?

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<sup>257</sup> Sean Levine argues that the dominating western paradigm of Just War Theory is a cultural impediment to our willingness to “encounter Moral Injury in our returning warriors.” Levine is a Orthodox Christian chaplain in the United States Army. He strongly argues against the notion that there is anything “good” about war. See, Levine, Sean, “Legal War, Sin, and ‘Moral Injury’ in the Age of Modern Warfare,” in Robert Robert, Douglas Pryer. eds *War and Moral Injury*, (New York: Cascade Books, 2018), 219.

<sup>258</sup> KIA (Killed in Action). However, according to the report, veteran suicide per day decreased from 2014-2015. 2014 was the highest suicided per day rate (6,587). See the *2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report*, United States Department of Veteran Affairs. Google., Accessed 8-28-2021.16. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-11-2020-508.pdf>

<sup>259</sup> See, Levine, Sean, “Legal War, Sin, and ‘Moral Injury’ in the Age of Modern Warfare,” in Robert Robert, Douglas Pryer. eds *War and Moral Injury*, (New York: Cascade Books, 2018), 219.

<sup>260</sup> Nakashima, Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair*, xvii.

<sup>261</sup> Nakashima, Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 40.

<sup>262</sup> Nakashima, Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 115. They mean the soul repair of an individual and a nation.

### 2.3 The Shift Away from PTSD

By the 1980s, the construct of PTSD dominated the understanding of nonphysical wounding. However, by the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, conversation concerning a different type of nonphysical wound became established in research and literature.<sup>263</sup> Researchers began relating cases of a debilitating sense of darkness, loneliness, despair, and depression and what appeared to be a transgression to a warrior's moral understanding of the universe. By the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, theologians, counselors, clinicians, pastors, and chaplains popularized the notion of a soul wound. The current conversation is part of a long history of observing a type of post-war experience that does not check the boxes of military conditioning and psychology. Various names for nonphysical combat trauma became entrenched over the centuries in common vernacular, e.g., 'soldier's heart,' 'spiritual death,' the lost generation of World War I, 'battle fatigue,' 'shell shock,' the 'thousand-yard stare,' Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Stress Disorder (TSD), 'stress wound,' 'spiritual wound,' 'soul wound,' 'invisible wound,' 'moral injury,' and traumatic brain injury (TBI). While each appellation has a context and speaks to a unique facet, they all identify a type of nonphysical combat trauma.

I will now turn to the innovative research of Brett Litz. The concept of moral wounding deepened our understanding and allowed us to speak of combat trauma as a nonphysical wound to the 'soul' of a warrior. The movement gained traction with the groundbreaking study by Litz and company, titled "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and

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<sup>263</sup> The diagnosis, PTSD, is a fear-based model. Understanding 'soul wounding' may entail responses of fear from a theological perspective. Or, responding to such a phenomena, theologians may examine it from what their tradition deems to be 'God's Perspective' *via* their sacred texts.

intervention strategy.”<sup>264</sup> Having assessed the limitations in the prevailing PTSD research models, Litz (*et al.*) surmised,

We are doing a disservice to our service members and veterans if we fail to conceptualize and address the lasting psychological, biological, *spiritual*, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations, that is, moral injury.<sup>265</sup> [emphasis mine]

Their proposal was two-fold: “stimulate discourse and empirical research” and “offer specific treatment.”<sup>266</sup> Most recently, Litz, Lebowitz, Gray, and Nash pushed the latter's limits in publishing their innovative approach to therapy, *Adaptive Disclosure*. It begins with a unique presupposition that life-threatening situations may not be the traumatizing event for a veteran over a lifetime, for their training equips them well to survive, adapt and overcome. Adaptation appears to be the case for many veterans.<sup>267</sup> Their presupposition opened the door to other therapeutic strategies for life-threatening “traumatic loss” with the “onset of guilt” and “inner conflict produced by moral injury associated with shame and self-handicapping behaviors.”<sup>268</sup> Litz and others further open the door for the conversation surrounding the phenomenon of moral injury.

While it is beyond this project's scope to thoroughly analyze their method, I note its intent to break away from old paradigms by including cognitive behavioral therapy *and* “other therapeutic strategies.”<sup>269</sup> The phrase “other therapeutic strategies” should not be passed over lightly, for Litz and company countered what they called the “zeitgeist” or dominating spirit of

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<sup>264</sup> See *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (Dec 2009). Accessed 8-28-2021.

<sup>265</sup> Litz, Brett T., Nathan Stein, Eileen Delaney, Leslie Lebowitz, William P. Nash, Caroline Silva, Shira, “Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (2009) 695-706.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> Litz, Brett, et al, *Adaptive Disclosure* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>268</sup> Litz, Brett, et al, *Adaptive Disclosure*, 3.

<sup>269</sup> Litz, Brett, *Adaptive Disclosure*, 3.

present PTSD and combat stress therapy. Litz and others opened the door for the conversation surrounding moral injury and soul wounds as legitimate phenomena worthy of research.

## 2.4 The Organic Evolution of Emerging Combat Trauma Literature

Many warriors may be surprised that their training does not prevent their negative experiences after killing, and the topic of killing in combat is still in its “infancy.”<sup>270</sup> They report that while the terms PTSD and moral injury are helpful, such terms do not adequately cover the range of their experiences. In place of moral injury, warriors have also offered the following: *spiritual injury*, *emotional injury*, *injury to personal values*, *injury to life values*, *moral trauma*, *moral wounds*, and *moral disruption*.<sup>271</sup>

Breaking free from the zeitgeist has been a lengthy process. Trimble posits that the experience of the Civil War, World I, and the concept of workman’s compensation in cases of loss and trauma (as a worldwide phenomenon) became the cultural genesis of the “interest in posttraumatic disorders.”<sup>272</sup> Interest in postcombat trauma is rooted in experience observed by soldiers during and after World War I. For example, Mott coined the phrase “shell shock” in 1919 when he referred to a concussive trauma to the brain. France and Britain led the way in the latter half of World War I with an innovative application of “forward psychology,” whereby they

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<sup>270</sup> Maguen, Shira, Kristine Burkman, “Combat-Related Killing: Expanding Evidence-Based Treatment for PTSD,” *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 20, no. 4 (November 2013), 476-479. DOI: 10.1016/j.cbpra.2013.05.003. (Accessed 8-28-2021).

<sup>271</sup> Drescher, Kent, David W. Foy, Caroline Kelly, Anna Leshner, Kerrie Schutz, Brett Litz, “An Exploration of the Viability and Usefulness of the Construct of Moral Injury in War Veterans,” *Traumatology* 17, no. 17 (), 8-13. DOI: 10.1177/153476556110395615. (8-28-2021).

<sup>272</sup> Trimble, Michael, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: History of a Concept,” page 7, in Charlse R. Figley, ed., *Trauma and Its Wake: The Study and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985), 7.

designated rest areas near the frontlines for physically and emotionally exhausted warriors so that they may re-integrate them into the fighting force.<sup>273</sup>

It was then that the United States Military began systematically studying the phenomenon. At the onset of World War II and in the research of Myers in 1940, researchers first discriminated between “shell concussion” (akin to Traumatic Brain Injury/TBI) and “shell shock.” The latter is the psycho-socio-emotional-spiritual aftermath of combat in veterans regardless of exposure to concussive force.<sup>274</sup> The application of psychology in modern warfare and the massive research and treatment cannot be underestimated.<sup>275</sup> Its contribution has allowed researchers to identify various invisible wounds impacting veterans *and* their families.

Consequently, coming home may be as shocking as their deployment.<sup>276</sup> Because a sizeable percentage of returning warriors do not transition well from war to their prior homes, the concept of homecoming is a sub-field of study. Though the moral/theological/spiritual dimensions became a new frontline for research, the tone of ECTL is one of regaining a lost insight into a phenomenon

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<sup>273</sup> The acronym, PIES, describes their innovation (Proximity, Immediacy, expectancy, and simplicity, cited from K. L. Artiss, “Human Behavior Under Stress: From Combat to Social Psychiatry,” *Military Medicine* 128 (1963), 1011-1015, in Todd C. Helmus, Russel W. Glenn, *Steeling the Mind: Combat Stress Reactions and Their Implications for Urban Warfare* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2004), 12. This is near similar to the purpose of Kṛṣṇa’ *śādhi* is meant to accomplish—reorder and prepare Arjuna for his re-engagement in the war and provide a means by which a *kṣatriya* may return again and again when experiencing a deconstruction of his interior, integrated life.

<sup>274</sup> Trimble, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: History of a Concept,” 8.

<sup>275</sup> See Matthews, Michael D., *Head Strong: How Psychology is Revolutionizing War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Negative responses to trauma are “normal” and may be adaptive. He notes the overwhelming tendency in research and publications to focus on the negative consequences of PTSD, but we must not forget the real phenomenon known as Post Traumatic Growth (PTG). Also, all soldiers may not experience trauma, but they all experience “adversity,” and “resilience” is the characteristic found in persons who are able to quickly “bounce back” to normal functioning. I do not intend to downplay training for resilience for adapting and overcoming adversity. My intention is to make the case that a Christian soldier needs physical, mental, *and* theological resilience. The grimmest example would be how soldiers are conditioned for reflexive reactions in combat. See, Dave Grossman, *On Killing*, 253-256. Grossman describes how nations following WWII drastically changed their training toward I. P. Pavlov’s conditioning and the application of B.F. Skinner’s “behavioral conditioning.” For example, rather than shooting a paper target with a series of circles and a bullseye, modern soldiers focus on silhouettes that flip up and stay down when hit by a bullet.

<sup>276</sup> Bouvard, Marguerite Guzman, *The Invisible Wounds of War: Coming Home from Iraq and Afghanistan* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2012), 55, 58.

as old as war itself. Though the degree of understanding of nonphysical wounding is greatly enhanced, we are now discovering new concepts as much as we are learning how to articulate ancient concepts known by our ancestors. The ideas are generally the same, but the names have changed because we see what we somehow missed in recent generations.

## **2.5 Analysis of A non-Physical Wound**

In 1980, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-III) officially classified Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The paradigm change began in the early 1980s by moving away from Post Traumatic Stress as a disorder (PTSD) or illness, for the label of ‘disorder’ implied a mental sickness, a disease, or a syndrome. Current scholarship argues that combat stress is just one of the possible non-physical, invisible wounding observed in veterans. It is no less a wound because it is mental, moral, emotional, and spiritual. As understanding increases, Coutois noted that moral injury is a profoundly human and broadly “complex trauma.”<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, it matters not if society deems the conflict to be a “good war.”<sup>278</sup> There are excellent resources for challenging the dominant paradigm, such as *Combat Stress Injury* by Charles Figley and William P. Nash.

Figley and Nash include a chapter by Drescher, Smith, and Foy titled “Spirituality and Readjustment Following War-Zone Experiences.”<sup>279</sup> Drescher, Smith, and Foy observed two general categorizations among United States Marines returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—the “Never-recovers” and the “Nothing-wrongs.” They were surprised by how open they

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<sup>277</sup> Courtois, C. A., “Complex trauma, complex reactions: Assessment and treatment,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, and Training* 41, 412-425, cited in Dombo, Gray, and Early, 199.

<sup>278</sup> Meagher, *Killing from the Inside Out*, 13.

<sup>279</sup> Drescher, Kent D., Smith, Mark W., Foy, David W., “Spirituality and Readjustment Following War-Zone Experiences,” cited in Figley, Charles R., and Nash, William P., *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 295.



were to spiritual issues and the degree of their theological reflection in both cases. Very few admitted that they “blamed God” for their experiences and accepted the consequences of their actions in combat. Many returned, showing positive signs of Post Traumatic Growth (PTG). Many expressed a renewed desire to become more active in their faith tradition. The “Never-recovers” tended to fear that they would be forever (negatively) changed because of the negative impact of what they had seen and done. The “Nothing-wrongs” were reluctant to admit that they were traumatized or denied their trauma after experiencing personal, psychological, or spiritual growth. However, Germaine to our project, almost all concurred that their combat experiences powerfully impacted their “spiritual selves.”<sup>280</sup>

In addition, after evaluating medical personnel and chaplains, Drescher, Smith, and Foy made distinctions between their “spiritual life” and their “humanity.” They noted that distinguishable “connection points” remained in men and women. Most returning veterans reported challenges to their faith, a realization of a new purpose, and a change in their spiritual/religious practice. Many also said that combat exposure affected their self-understanding of vocation—their “sense of call.”<sup>281</sup> Drescher and company mapped how their changed sense of humanity negatively impacted their creativity, ability to give and receive love, use of advanced language, understanding of self-transcendence, sense of autonomy, and perception of beauty and goodness in the world (aesthetics).<sup>282</sup>

According to Jonathon Shay (and others), the clinical term PTSD does not adequately capture the profound wound that “wrecks veteran’s lives, crushes them to suicide, and promotes

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<sup>280</sup> Figley, Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 298.

<sup>281</sup> Figley, Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 298.

<sup>282</sup> Figley, Nash, *Combat Stress Injury*, 298.

domestic and/or criminal violence.”<sup>283</sup> Whereas PTSD research is vast, the innovative term moral injury needs further “construct validation.”<sup>284</sup> Vargas, Hanson, Kraus, Drescher, and Foy believe a “bio-psycho-social-spiritual” model is necessary, as well as future clinical research with an “emphasis upon identifying appropriate interventions to alleviate moral injury-related distress.”<sup>285</sup> Kopacz refers to one study of 117 chaplains asked to respond to the “primary emotional component” of at-risk veterans (suicide). He writes, “Fifty-Eight percent cited despair or hopelessness, no meaning or purpose to life, guilt, anger or resentment, sadness or grief.”<sup>286</sup> Regardless of the historical appellations, be they “nostalgia,” “nervous disease,” “soldier’s heart,” “shell shock,” or “combat fatigue,” moral injury (nonphysical wounding) appears to be an “internal experience of the soldier” causing feelings of guilt and shame.<sup>287</sup> Boudreau argues that the traditional diagnosis of PTSD “renders soldiers automatically into mental patients instead of wounded warriors.”<sup>288</sup> Therefore, innovative language is needed to express a more holistic understanding of nonphysical wounding.

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<sup>283</sup> Shay, Jonathon, “Moral Injury,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 2014 vol 31, no 2, 182-191.

<sup>284</sup> Drescher, Kent D., David W. Foy, Caroline Kelly, Anna Leshner, Kerrie Schutz, and Brett Litz. “An Exploration of the Viability and Usefulness of the Construct of Moral Injury in War Veterans.” *Traumatology* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 8–13.

<sup>285</sup> Flipse Vargas, Alison, Thomas Hanson, Douglas Kraus, Kent Drescher, and David Foy. “Moral Injury Themes in Combat Veterans’ Narrative Responses From the National Vietnam Veterans’ Readjustment Study.” *Traumatology* 19, no. 3 (September 2013): 243–50. The greatest cause of the symptom “lack of trust” resulted from the event “Civilian deaths.” Killing noncombatants (intentionally or unintentionally) deteriorates the capacity of a warrior “to trust.”

<sup>286</sup> Kopacz, Marek S., “Moral Injury—A war trauma affecting current and former military personnel,” *International Journal of Social Psychology*, 2014 vol 60 (issue 7) pp 722-723, citing Kopacz, M. S., McCarten, J. M. and Pollitt, M. J., VHA chaplaincy contact with veterans at increased risk of suicide (*Southern Medical Journal*). Families of veterans suffer from PTSD and moral injury. See Nash, William P. and Litz, Brett, “Moral Injury: A Mechanism for War-Related Psychological Trauma in Military Family Members,” *Clinical Child & Family Psychological Review* 16:365-375 2013.

<sup>287</sup> Dombo, Eileen A., Gray, Cathleen, Early, Barbara, “The Trauma of Moral Injury: Beyond the Battlefield,” *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 32: 197-210, 2013

<sup>288</sup> Boudreau, Tyler, “The Morally Injured,” *Massachusetts Review*, 52 (3/4), 746-754, cited in Dombo, “The Trauma of Moral Injury: Beyond the Battlefield,” 198.

Current research regarding moral injury is far from defined. In *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism*, Tom Frame includes several perspectives. For example, Matthew Beard distinguishes a “therapeutic” from a “philosophical” approach and whether the injury is “world-directed” or “self-directed.”<sup>289</sup> Viewing moral injury from the therapeutic gaze implies treatable psychological wounds; therefore, the aim is to heal. The philosophical perspective aims to differentiate the emotional responses appropriate for the traumatic reaction. For example, the negative feeling of guilt is treatable (therapeutic view), but guilt may also be appropriate to the circumstance (philosophical perspective).<sup>290</sup> Beard concluded that the best way forward is to approach moral injury as “both therapeutically oriented and philosophically inclined.”<sup>291</sup> Ned Dobos makes a different distinction between what a soldier feels and who a soldier is. He distinguishes between the “aroused” emotions of a soldier as a result of “moral trauma” and how a soldier should or does not act as a result of “moral degradation.” Referring to his distinction between the former and latter, Dobos emphasizes, “A soldier that suffers moral trauma *feels* like a bad person. A soldier that suffers moral degradation *is* a bad person.”<sup>292</sup>

In another chapter, Rhiannon Neilsen makes a different distinction between a moral injury and a “moral affront.” Not all morally wrong events experienced by a person constitute a moral injury, but a moral injury may result from subsequent responses by the person who experiences a moral affront to their sense of right and wrong. Neilsen notes the predominance of psychology in the field of study and works to move scholarship away from a psychological examination of emotions. In doing so, she speaks in terms of agency and liability. She titles her chapter “Dents in

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<sup>289</sup> Beard, Matthew, “Conceptual Distinctions,” 112-114, in Tom Frame, ed., *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism* (Sydney: University of New South Wells Publishing, 2015).

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>292</sup> Dobos, Ned, “Moral Trauma and Moral Degradation,” cited in Tom Frame, *Moral Injury*, 126.

the Soul?” Neilsen implies that an agent may “take a dent” in their moral system, but their moral system has not been injured. Rather, it has been affronted. The agent is liable for how they morally respond to that affront.<sup>293</sup> The examples above illustrate the developing understanding of moral injury as a nonphysical combat trauma. It illustrates Frame’s summarization in his introduction.

An uninformed reader would be excused for thinking that the concept is undisputed; its meaning uncontested; and that the research underpinning moral injury is unproblematic. Moral injury is, however, still a relatively new and largely unexplored term. In the extant literature, moral injury appears to be a phrase lacking precision, a concept looking for consensus and a notion seeking a parent discipline. At the moment, it appears to be a foster child still hoping that someone will call it their own and to give it a name that fits its face.<sup>294</sup>

Accordingly, the concept of a moral injury is becoming interchangeable with “soul wound,” or “spiritual injury,” or “invisible wound.” The movement toward nonpsychological constructs continues to emerge. Three leading scholars are Jonathon Shay, Edward Tick, and Rita Nakashima Brock.

## 2.6 Edward Tick

In his well-regarded book, *War and the Soul*, Edward Tick approaches nonphysical wounding from an ontologically cosmopolitan perspective. He defines the soul as the “center of human consciousness and experience.” Over history, it has been “conceptualized” in various ways: the “drive to create and preserve life,” the “awareness of oneself as a discrete entity moving through space and time,” our “intellectual power” that “thinks, reasons, and understands,” the dynamic that provides humans their “ethical sensibilities,” “our will, our volition,” our “aesthetic sensibility,” the “part of us that loves and seeks intimacy,” the “seat of imagination, our image-

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<sup>293</sup> Neilsen, Rhiannon, “Dents in the Soul?”, Tom Frame, *Moral Injury*, 146.

<sup>294</sup> Frame, *Moral Injury*, 3.

making and image-interpreting functions,” the “great cry of I AM awakened in the individual,” the residence for what “depth psychologists call the shadow,” or that aspect of humanity that society “judges as unacceptable.”<sup>295</sup>

Tick begins his discussion with the trans-cultural, universal warrior archetype consistently present in cultures throughout history, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to the Greek tragedies. He defines it as “natural, innate, and deep,” a “source of extraordinary energies,” possessing “psychospiritual importance, and . . . [a] social role,” that gives shape and significance to the warrior identity.<sup>296</sup> Archetypes vary concerning “universal role template[s]” that exist as “living psychic forces.”<sup>297</sup> They are rooted in cultural myths that give deep meaning to life and compel human behavior. According to Tick, war is a cultural-religious myth rooted in theologies as a divine action that sometimes predicates divinely endorsed human activities.<sup>298</sup> Here is the dilemma facing modern warriors:

In the moral and spiritual vacuum caused by this much destruction, the only meaning that remains is mere survival. And survival, now reduced to an accident in the midst of global carnage, is laden with a sense of unworthiness and guilt. . . . Yet the mythic dimensions of war remain very much with us as universal patterns in the human psyche that we attempt to replicate in every epoch of history. Young men, and now women, too, still march off as individual combatants striving to live out the model of the mythic warrior-hero. . . . But into what kind of arena do they carry their patriotism and their impulse for heroism and initiation? We are trapped in a terrible tension between the soul’s craving for [the] realization of the warrior archetype and the realities of a warfare that devastates the soul who seeks it.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Tick, Edward, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation’s Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 2005), 16-22.

<sup>296</sup> Tick, Edward, *Warrior’s Return: Restoring the Soul After War* (Boulder: Sounds True, 2014), 8.

<sup>297</sup> Edward, *War and the Soul*, 29.

<sup>298</sup> Edward, *War and the Soul*, 39.

<sup>299</sup> Edward, *War and the Soul*, 78.

When Tick puts his finger on the powerful cultural reality known as the warrior archetype, he vocalizes what many people seem to have as an inherent agreement that societies need men and women who will meet the enemy at the gates. All cultures have witnessed the psycho-socio-spiritual toll of those sons and daughters who depart and return from war. Every generation continues to seek this “tension” despite the consequences. In short, Tick emphasizes that PTSD misses the mark, for postcombat trauma (including PTSD) is “primarily moral, spiritual, and [an] aesthetic disorder—in effect not a *psychological* but a *soul* disorder.”<sup>300</sup>

As one discovers in ECTL literature, precise descriptions of the soul’s experience in combat are easier said than done.<sup>301</sup> If Frame is correct that moral injury is “a phrase lacking precision, a concept looking for consensus and a notion seeking a parent discipline,” it is because the trailblazers created the “foster child still hoping that someone will call it their own.” In other words, it grew organically from their observations. Unfortunately, Tick’s writing illustrates how ECTL ‘soul talk’ is ontologically ambiguous and undefined by dominant, sacred, text-based traditions. While a tremendously important and influential book, Tick conglomerates philosophical/theological perspectives. For example, Tick ignores distinct theological “particularities” contextually constrained to a tradition’s sacred text.

For example, what does Tick mean when he identifies the soul as the “great cry of I AM awakened in the individual?” The expression “I AM” directly references the self-revelation of Israel’s covenant God to Moses at the burning bush scene in *Exodus* 3.1-6. Later, in v14, upon

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<sup>300</sup> Edward, *War and the Soul*, 108.

<sup>301</sup> For example, while I do not dismiss their experience or the reality to which they speak, one routinely finds titles such as “Landmine Blast to a Soul,” or “Healing the Human Spirit,” but very little to no theological and ontological reflection. See Patricia Driscoll and Celia Straus, *Hden Battles on Unseen Fronts* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2009). Their work is helpful, though, in sharing the experience of Traumatic Brain Injury, and, as a trained theologian and pastor, I see a need for cross-disciplined research in the relationship between TBI and a soldier’s spiritual fitness/life/health.

Moses' request, "God" (אֱלֹהִים/ὁ θεός) identifies himself as "I AM who I AM" (אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה /εἰμι ὁ ὢν). In v16, Exodus combines the generic name for God with the specific covenant name revealed to Israel (אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה/κύριος ὁ θεός). Putting aside the point that this clause is one of the most important ontological passages of the *Bible*, it is not about God longing to be awakened in each individual. It is clearly about God identifying himself *to an* individual. Therefore, a Jewish or Christian may (should) automatically question the meaning of Tick's statement, for they know they are not the 'I AM.' While Tick draws from several perspectives to be comprehensive, subsequent soul-talk would become ambiguous, for conglomerating them presents a combination foreign to their tradition's theological distinctions. Yet, the casual observer would recognize that despite the inaccuracy (he is not a biblical scholar and theologian), the gist of Tick's point rings true. Regardless of one's ontological constraints, something about combat deeply impacts the mysterious interior reality of a human being.

## 2.7 Larry Kent Graham

Larry Kent Graham explains in *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls*, "We injure our souls by failing to follow our moral compass, or when our moral compass becomes misdirected because of the harm others do to us." Thus, Graham coins the term "physicians of the soul" for those who directly work on the front lines with combat veterans. They are responsible for the nomenclature of soul wounds, the ones who "name and frame the wounds of the soul and the disease of the spirit to engage in vital healing collaboration."<sup>302</sup> The honor is theirs, but those who stand on their shoulders must continue to question and debate.

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<sup>302</sup> Graham, Larry Kent, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2017, 77

For example, Tick defines the “warrior soul” as “that *part* of us that wishes to serve with high honor for moral purpose.”<sup>303</sup> Is that “part” of us the noneternal, created being “in the image of “God” of Genesis 1.27; 2.8, or is it the eternal and uncreated, immutable, non-acting *ātman* of *Bg* 2.11, 18, 20? Tick most likely means something like the metaphysical dimension of our humanity, but here lies the problem because we are left to fill in the blanks of his generality.

Brock and Lettini share the story of a U.S. Army Chaplain Herm whose experience serving combat troops in Vietnam led him to conclude that “something profound and soul-endangering was the source of their suffering, not just “shell shock.”<sup>304</sup> There is no question regarding the profundity of what Chaplain Herm observed as he shared Psalm 51 with mangled survivors and those who did their duty despite their view that they were executing an immoral war. However, was that “something” endangering their soul or the *architecture* that allowed them to perceive and reason their “inner world of experience?”<sup>305</sup>

Graham shares a conversation with a therapist who worked with combat veterans. She shared how veterans connected with the language of soul wounds, soul repair, and moral injury. Based on her observations, she reported a “life changing shift in perception of self when the person's soul becomes the focus of healing.”<sup>306</sup> She puts her finger on why there should be ‘soul talk,’ even when ambiguous and theologically compromised. Simply put, it connects with those who have experienced combat, *and it works*. There is no denying the positive impact of terms like soul wound, soul repair, and moral injury. It connects with what she says is their “deepest part, ” meaning the name will be in ECTL for the foreseeable future. It will stay as long as it continues to

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<sup>303</sup> Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War*, 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>304</sup> Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury and War*, 27.

<sup>305</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 9.

<sup>306</sup> Graham, *Moral Injury*, 15.



meaningfully express that trans-cultural human phenomenon experienced throughout the history of warfare.

Yet, Graham uses the idea of moral injury synonymously with soul wound. What is a “fractured soul? As previously stated, Graham writes, “physicians of the soul name and frame the wounds of the soul and the disease of the spirit.”<sup>307</sup> Graham refers to pastors, counselors, chaplains, psychiatrists, and anyone who serves combat veterans in the Christian tradition. He defines the soul and the trauma of moral injury.

... the soul is an integrative process at the center of persons and communities. The soul is the integrating center of awareness, meaning, and value of the cumulative pain, joy, pleasure, and sensibilities of the human body and the body politic. It is the site of our deepest pain and our most sacred aspirations and values. Moral injury breaks apart its wholeness and stains its purity. Because the soul is also contextually creative, it is the site where healing and transformation may evolve. It is an enduring reality that is also changing for good and ill.<sup>308</sup>

Like Tick, Graham’s description is meaningful, for he puts his finger on an authentic human phenomenon. Unfortunately, his lack of a defined, text-based perspective (in this example) begs the question of what is wounded. His descriptions appear to be more of an epistemological quality. A better question may be, could the deconstruction of the epistemological processes better explain what moral injury “broke apart?”

## **2.8 A Lack of Text-Based Reflection**

Despite the ambiguity, Tick strikes a powerful chord that resonates in the experience of veterans *and* their families. One reason for the soulish ambiguity may be a lack of interest by

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<sup>307</sup> Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls*, 77.

<sup>308</sup> Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls*, 79.

theologians, but the landscape is quickly changing.<sup>309</sup> A second reason for the ambiguity may be that he does not write from a perspective grounded in a tradition's sacred text, e.g., the *Bible*, the *Koran*, or the *Bg*. Consequently, theological/ontological distinctions tend to be lost as they are ignored or merged with other perspectives. For example, Tick makes no confessional commitment, as do Duane Larson and Jeff Zust in *Care for the Sorrowing Soul*.<sup>310</sup>

Tick brings a universalist presupposition to his mythic representation of the soul that cannot align with different faith traditions. As a result, his hermeneutic tends to merge rather than honor boundaries. Such lack of nuance leads to statements like the following.

In war we embody and wrestle with god powers. The politics and hostilities of warfare rise from the gut of the war god. War evokes in us an altered state of consciousness. Odin, Ares, the Lord of Hosts, Lord Krishna possess us. We are their servants.<sup>311</sup>

Tick is speaking poetically and metaphorically about the warrior archetype when he uses language like, "rise from the gut of the war god." However, theologically speaking, Odin, Ares, and especially Yahweh ("LORD of Hosts) and Kṛṣṇa are not figurative, symbolic, or metaphorical references to "God" in their respective texts. According to the *Bible*, Yahweh is the covenant God who brought his people out of Egypt. In the *Bg*, Krishna is the supreme being of the universe. If he means that war has a way of sweeping an entire nation in its allure, there are notable examples, e.g., the Nazi domination of antebellum Germany. War is alluring and bewitches humans like a

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<sup>309</sup> See Powers, Brian S., *Full Darkness: Original Sin, Moral Injury, and Wartime Violence* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019). Powers brings a systematic theological approach by grounding the conversation of moral injury in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin.,

<sup>310</sup> See Larson, and Duane, Zust, Jeff, *Care for the Sorrowing Soul*. Larson and Zust frame their chapter, "Spiritual Dimensions for Mitigating and Healing Soul Suffering," by stating that they examined the spiritual dimensions of moral injury/soul wound from their "Christian construction of directed conscientious vocation (DCV).

<sup>311</sup> Tick, *War and the Soul*, 38, 41.

siren's song.<sup>312</sup> However, statements regarding an “altered state of consciousness” and a “God” who “possess[es] us” deserve greater scrutiny.

Tick, like others, speak of a soul and a soul wound, but they provide very little (often no) text-based support. If they mean by using the word soul, the part of human experience we may know and feel but cannot physically touch, then so be it. But, if that is the case, then there is no need to speak of Odin, Ares, Yahweh, or Kṛṣṇa. Naming the names without defining the predicates behind those names blurs theological boundaries.

## 2.9 Rita Nakashima Brock

In their book, *Soul Repair*, Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini weave their experiences while tracking the narratives of four veterans that testified at the Truth Commission on Conscience and War (TCCW). Brock and Lettini's synthesis contributes toward filling a theological void in combat trauma and moral injury. In addition, they help to further describe moral injury as “something more profound and soul endangering” than “shell shock” or PTSD.<sup>313</sup> Tyler E. Boudreau captures this type of moral change.

There were moments when I looked into the eyes of the Iraqi people that I saw in the street, and I could not bring to mind anything more decent or beautiful. Other times, those same eyes brought a bile-like hatred up from my gut and it burned in my mouth, as acid burns. It burned away my humanity and cleared the way for that craving to kill, that taste for blood that I'd been harboring for so long. I was torn by the war. There really was no telling how I'd feel from one moment to the next. There was no fixed point from which to navigate. No anchorage.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Salinas, Antonio M., *Siren's Song: The Allure of War* (Atlanta: Deeds Publishing, 2012).

<sup>313</sup> Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*, 27. These words are actually a summarization of one of the veterans, Herman Keizer, Jr.

<sup>314</sup> Boudreau, Tyler E., *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of A Marine* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2008), 98.

Brock and Lettini write of the reality of the soul wound phenomenon in their final summation,

Soul repair is how we hold on to our own humanity and how, at the same time, we can face the unbearable truths of who we can be in war. It requires us to engage the difficult truths of war and our relationship to it, a process that is at once both individual and collective. It is about “remembering” the truth of what we did and who we are, so that we might reweave our moral fiber as people and as a nation.<sup>315</sup>

In a book titled, *Soul Repair*, there is little discussion on what Brock and Lettini mean by the term soul. There are, however, instances of undefined, figurative soul talk. For example, Brock and Lettini write, “Soldiers must sharply divide their souls between those they love and those they are supposed to kill.”<sup>316</sup> When a soldier is deployed, “constant reminders of home can split a soldier’s soul.”<sup>317</sup> What do Brock and Lettini mean by dividing or splitting the soul of a soldier? What does the following statement mean, “The conflict tore at his soul ...?”<sup>318</sup> When they refer to the work of Herman Keizer, a veteran who took it upon himself to offer support groups for struggling veterans, what do they mean by a “sacred space and time that held the soul of soldiers in a moment outside of secular history and reminded them of a humanity they shared across the ages?”<sup>319</sup> The answer may be that “split a soldier’s soul” is simply figurative language connoting the pain of separation on deployment while “sharply divide” one’s soul refers to compartmentalizing killing and loving one’s family. Figurative language explains much, but ECTL writers often do not write as if a soul wound is a metaphorical term. Instead, they write in the indicative, meaning there is an actual wound to the soul of a human being.

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid, Brock & Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 115.

<sup>316</sup> Brock & Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 71.

<sup>317</sup> Brock & Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 71.

<sup>318</sup> Brock & Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 81.

<sup>319</sup> Brock & Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 81.

## 2.10 The Contribution of Jonathon Shay

While PTSD became the dominant paradigm moving toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a look back to the past launched a new direction. Shay presupposed that the ancients understood realities about combat that we in the modern ages have missed.

His seminal contribution, *Achilles in Vietnam*, articulated and mainstreamed the observations of therapists who had already spent countless hours (decades) listening to American Vietnam War veterans. Many remained emotionally, socially, spiritually, and psychologically wounded from their exposure to combat despite the decades of distance from the reported events. Coupled with his latter work, *Odysseus in America*, Shay also sets the standard for applying the combat context of the Greek classics to post-combat trauma. Until Shay's work, therapists and chaplains observed the interior traumas, but they lacked precise language. Because of Shay's work, this catch-all phrase is decreasing (outright rejected by many). More importantly, the conversation shifted to spiritual and theological categories through his reading and research from the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*.

Shay's appreciation for the value of the classics is evident on every page. *Achilles in Vietnam* emphasizes two consistent themes of prolonged combat exposure: betrayal of what is assumed morally "right" and the emergence of an enraged, uncontrollable "berserker state."<sup>320</sup> His research should not be exclusively categorized as clinical psychology, even though his formal training is in psychology and psychiatry. Shay describes moral injury as a "soul wound inflicted by doing something that violates one's ethics, ideals, or attachments."<sup>321</sup> What shay re-introduced

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<sup>320</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, xiii.

<sup>321</sup> Shay, "Moral Injury," *Intertexts* 16, no. 1 (Sprng 2012), p57

is the concept of “invisible wounding” long observed in fighting men and those families and communities to whom they return.

The chief contribution of Shay’s approach is not merely his skilled interchange between shared themes of Greek tragedies and modern combat. Instead, he articulates the moral violation of a warrior’s worldview when the breach of deeply held trust causes lasting trauma far beyond what the soldier has seen and done. Occasionally, it generates extreme rage in combat or postcombat after severe, chronic, traumatic stress is left unchecked.

The violation and the rage are linked to the moral fabric of the martial community, e.g., the ‘chain of command.’ Ancient and modern warriors come from a morally constructed world and enter a new moral construction by which the military operates. Homer’s term from *The Iliad* is *themis*, translated by Shay as “what’s right.” Although there is no dynamic equivalent, the generalization is that a leader who violates what his subordinates know to be morally right causes wounds to the corporate and individual psycho-social corporate culture.<sup>322</sup> Likewise, prolonged exposure to the risks of combat and repeated violations of *themis* results in enragement and may cause the warrior to “go berserk.” In the subsequent decades following the publication of *Achilles in Vietnam*, most credit Shay for coining the now differentiated term of moral injury. Shay asks,

Is betrayal of “what’s right” essential to combat trauma, or is betrayal simply one of many terrible things that happen in war? Aren’t terror, shock, horror, and grief at the death of friends trauma enough? No one can conclusively answer these questions today. However, . . . I’ve come to strongly believe through my work with Vietnam veterans: that moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury. Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so long as “what’s right” has not also been violated.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 5-6.

<sup>323</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 20.

Shay's admission to not being a classicist does not deter him from reading the Greek epic narratives with an eye toward combat veterans. On the contrary, his work is an uncanny example of bridging two horizons in a reciprocal exchange of ideas.

### **2.11 The Application of Greek Epics to ECTL**

The application of Greek epics to emerging combat trauma research is growing in popularity. For example, Nancy Sherman leads a renaissance of applied stoicism in military culture through her book, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind*.<sup>324</sup> Working from the *Illiad*, Christopher Coker in *Warrior Ethos* observes that society has bifurcated a warrior's profession from his vocation, affirming the former for killing but altering the latter to one of abhorring all war rather than glorifying it through one's prowess and corporate accomplishments.<sup>325</sup> Not that one glorifies war, but the honoring of the warcraft of a warrior. Speaking of a warrior's happiness and harmony, the perception of what is internally and outwardly real, "Soldiers require not only implicit confirmation of their identity but an explicit and emotionally charged confirmation that others bestow on them."<sup>326</sup> The community for which warriors sacrifice becomes a powerful medium for rehabilitation (if necessary). A rejection of the connection between a warrior's service and their sense of purpose causes debilitating confusion within the interior life. Robert Meagher notes that intentional *and* nonintentional agency in killing often led to a profound sense of "pollution" in the mind of the ancient Greek warrior.<sup>327</sup> Many

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<sup>324</sup> Sherman, Nancy, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>325</sup> Recognition and reputation for prowess is a common theme of the *Mhba*.

<sup>326</sup> Coker, Christopher, *Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror* (London: Routledge, 2007), 14.

<sup>327</sup> Meagher, Robert Emmet, *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 34ff.

warriors return from war, regretting their actions and struggling with their perception of how they may assimilate into civilian life.<sup>328</sup>

## Summary

In summary, nonphysical combat trauma is not merely the fear-based phenomenon known as PTSD. The literature increasingly describes it as a wound to the interior reality of a person, i.e., the soul. However, the most recent scholarship can be theologically scattershot because the term soul wound has become the new catch-all phrase. It is often used interchangeably with moral injury. Thus, there is ambiguity concerning the ontological/theological understanding of the nature of a soul wound. The emerging field of study has not reached a consensus on defining a soul wound because no sacred text-centered tradition has dominated ECTL. Lacking any dominant theological point of view, ontological reflection in ECTL can seem vague and, at times, superficial. This chapter builds upon the magnitude of scholarship and decades of dedication by trailblazers like Brett Litz, Edward Tick, Rita Brock, and Jonathon Shay. It recognized their significant contributions toward understanding what we all agree to be a pressing issue of our generation. However, our understanding goes only so far as the clarity of our discourse. There will continue to be soulish ambiguity until one tradition makes a defining contribution with explicit

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<sup>328</sup> Pressfield, Steven, *The Warrior Ethos* (Los Angeles: Black Irish Entertainment, LLC, 2011); *Gates of Fire: An epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998). Pressfield is a novelist, and his *The Warrior Ethos* is as criticized as it is praised, however, his writing captures an emotive appeal. Many warriors deeply connect with it. *Gates of Fire* is a classic military historical fiction, but should not be automatically dismissed because it is technically fiction, as is the case for Jeff Shaara, renowned for the historical accuracy of his many military historical fiction novels. *Gates of Fire* is a vivid, fascinating, and at times, gruesome, portrayal of Spartan ethos and combat. One example is Pressfield's inclusion of the phenomena of battle-hardened Trojan warriors involuntarily losing bowel control which the Greeks referred to as "watery bowels," also a commonly portrayed experience of both men and animals in *The Mahābhārata*. His descriptions of the psychological and physiological phenomena of warriors in combat is consistent with the research of Dave Grossman. See also, Bryan Doerries, *Theatre of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies can Teach us Today* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016). Doerries is a High School drama teacher who is recreating Greek classics and then inviting active duty servicemen and veterans to hear the message of ancient narratives that helped ancient warriors process their experiences



ontological/theological predicates. The following study (Part 2) will explain how Kṛṣṇa in the *Bg* re-ordered Arjuna to combat readiness. But first, I now turn to a critical reading of how selected scholars within Hindu Studies approach the combat context of the *Bg* and the *Mhba*.

## Chapter 3

### A Critical Reading of Selected Hindu Commentators

#### Introduction

In Chapter 2, I provided a critical reading of the direction of ECTL, and I explained how current soul talk leads to soulish ambiguity. One promising direction of ECTL is the emergence of sacred texts as resources for insight into nonphysical combat trauma. The *Bg* is a rich resource, but how do dominant Hindu commentators and traditions understand the combat context? In this chapter, I examine how selected scholars in Hindu Studies significantly differ in understanding the nature of the *Mhbn* war and the combat context of the *Bg*. For example, Vinoba Bhave praises the *Bg* to be the distillation of the *Mhba*. He claims it is a vast deposit of “pure gold,” the “essence,” the “central secret of this massive work,” the “cream” of the entire epic, a “treasure-house,” the “quintessence” of Kṛṣṇa-Vyāsa’s “heartbeat.”<sup>329</sup> Some see Arjuna as a symbolic warrior of man’s ultimate struggle. Some believe that historicity and vigorous debate are detrimental to understanding Kṛṣṇa’s message for the present day. Others dismiss the interpretations of ‘outsiders’ to their tradition and restrict primary source material (e.g., Madhvites).<sup>330</sup>

In the following sections, I organize the hermeneutical commitments of selected Hindu commentators into two categories: symbolic (symbolic with tension) and political. First, the commitment to an allegorical interpretation acknowledges the combat context of the *Bg*, but the actual war is of little to no concern. Secondly, within the symbolic camp, I examine how some commentators walk a middle ground and keep the historical context and symbolic meaning in tension with one another. Though these traditions gravitate to symbolic, allegorical, and

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<sup>329</sup> Bhave, *Talks on the Gita*, 16-17.

<sup>330</sup> Followers of Mādhvacharya.

metaphorical interpretations, the combat context plays a more significant role in understanding the text. Thirdly, I examine the commentators who understand (and apply) the combat context in terms of a mandate for political action, i.e., the Indian nationalist movement of the twentieth century. In other words, some make a very literal interpretation. Case in point, Indian nationalists, violently opposed the British colonial government, getting their inspiration from Kṛṣṇa's instructions to Arjuna to fight and kill the Kurus. I will use this chapter as background to my interaction with commentators in Chs. 4-8.

### **3.1 Commitment to A Symbolic Reading**

#### **3.1.1 Paramahansa Yogananda and Ranganathananda**

In *God Talks With Arjuna*, Yogananda attempts to hold on to the historicity of the war, but he ultimately leaves the combat context for a symbolic interpretation.

Sri Krishna's message in the Bhagavad Gita is the perfect answer for the modern age, and any age: Yoga of dutiful action, of non-attachment, and of meditation for God-realization. The Gita's wisdom is not for dry intellectualists to perform mental gymnastics with its sayings for the entertainment of dogmatists; but rather to show a man or woman living in the world, householder or renunciant, how to live a balanced life that includes the actual contact of God, by following the step-by-step methods of yoga.<sup>331</sup>

Yogananda summarizes the nature of the text with his conclusion to the introduction, "Each person has to fight his own battle of Kurukṣetra. It is a war not only worth winning, but in the divine order of the universe and of the eternal relationship between the soul and God, a war that sooner or later must be won."<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gītā: Royal Science of God-Realization: The immortal dialogue between soul and Spirit: A new translation and commentary*, chaps 1-5 (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2013), xxxi.

<sup>332</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks With Arjuna*, xlii.

Yogananda continues,

The historical background of a battle and the contestants therein have been used for the purpose of illustrating the spiritual and psychological battle going on between the attributes of the pure discriminative intellect in attunement with the soul and the blind sense-infatuated mind under the delusive influence of the ego.<sup>333</sup>

In Yogananda's approach, lessons are spiritual *and* psychological, and the characters and historical context of the war are merely illustrative. The only battle that matters is the struggle between the "pure discriminative intellect" in relationship to the soul and the base mind under the influence of the ego. His position is similar to Andrew Harvey, who acknowledges the combat context, bringing forth a functional value in the preface to his edited work, *Bhagavad Gita: Annotated & Explained*,

The dialogue it enshrines between the divine avatar Krishna and the soldier Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra is always taking place within the heart and soul of every human being on the battlefield of this terrible and beautiful world.... What the Gita does is dramatize in the most inspired way imaginable and for all time the full truth of this dialogue and the initiation it can make possible into full human divine life ...<sup>334</sup>

They both recognize the horrendously violent nature of the war that only illustrates the grave consequences of the metaphorical interior battlefield within every human heart. Ranganathananda refers to Arjuna's state of mind as a "psychic breakdown." Kṛṣṇa's vital goal is to teach Arjuna not to retreat from the "battle of life."<sup>335</sup> In universalizing the *Bg*, he interprets Swami Vivekananda Swamiji's goal as a "philosophy meant to make heroes out of clay" whose "spirit must be captured by us."<sup>336</sup> Consequently, he de-contextualizes the conversation. The true disciple of Kṛṣṇa is

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<sup>333</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks with Arjuna*, xxvi.

<sup>334</sup> Harvey, Andrew, *Bhagavad Gītā: Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), ix-xi

<sup>335</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 86.

<sup>336</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 92.

strong, fearless, and compassionate to all, characterized by “spiritual growth and spiritual realization.”<sup>337</sup> Ranganantha explains,

So that the whole subject of every human being is growth, development and fulfillment.... war is only in the first chapter. Afterwards, you don’t hear about the word ‘war,’ at all. It is only the big problem of total human development that Sri Kṛṣṇa handles throughout. And, therefore, this is not a book on war. This is a book of human development and fulfillment.<sup>338</sup>

Reflecting upon *Bg* 2.7, Ranganathananda continues his decontextualization.

We all pass through this kind of situation in our own lives. Arjuna is not unique, except in one sense. All of us have no battle to wage, [sic] or fight a war. Arjuna had to fight a war; but all of us have the battle of life, facing problems, overcoming them, trying to achieve life-fulfilment. That challenge is there before all of us. So, we are going to become Arjunas, going to fight with everybody. That is not the meaning of the Gita.... Take out that universal value from that situation. That is why, after the first half of the second chapter, you don’t hear of war at all. It is all about character, purity, love, compassion.<sup>339</sup>

In their respective approaches, Ranganathananda and Yogananda apply the *Bg* in a manner that addresses interior struggles all humans face, e.g., purpose and fulfillment. However, Ranganathananda’s final sentence introduces a critical division that requires further explanation. He writes, “That is why, after the first half of the second chapter, you don’t hear of war at all. It is all about character, purity, love, compassion.” The previous statement is perplexing and illustrates how interpreters can allow their hermeneutical bias to limit their interpretation. When direct references are in the text, one must ask why Ranganathananda ended the combat context in the second chapter of *Bg* 2. For example, there is the repeated imperative to “kill,” see *Bg* 3.41, 3.43;

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<sup>337</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 96.

<sup>338</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 96.

<sup>339</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 102-103.

11.34.<sup>340</sup> While the former two refer to an internal enemy, the latter (*Bg* 11.34) is a direct command, “No more trembling. *Kill!* Fight. You will kill your opponents [when you return] to battle.<sup>341</sup> Ranganathananda (and others such as Yogananda) acknowledge the war's imagery and symbolic significance, but he (they) ignore direct references to physical killing, e.g., Kṛṣṇa compels Arjuna to “yoke” to “violent, gory combat action,” to “perform enjoined [combat] action” (*Bg* 3.8).<sup>342</sup>

### 3.1.2 Commentators Holding Symbolism in Tension

Some within the dominant traditions acknowledge the combat context as they attempt to maintain a tension between an actual war and a deeper symbolic meaning. For example, Aurobindo affirms the historicity of the person Kṛṣṇa. Yet, he dismisses the relevance (and possibility) of ascertaining the “exact metaphysical connotation as it was understood by men of the time.”<sup>343</sup> Aurobindo emphasizes that bogging down in the orthodoxy of respective traditions is of little benefit for solving the unique challenges of humanity at this stage of its evolution. Aurobindo substantiates his claims from the long history of contradicting interpretations and counsels his followers to seek the “actual living truths ... apart from their metaphysical forms.” He implies time and space have moved beyond the horizon of Kṛṣṇa’s intent for Arjuna at the time of the historical battlefield. Therefore, sacred dialogue illumines readers so they may rightly hear and wisely apply essential truths. Aurobindo bifurcates what Kṛṣṇa possibly meant on the

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<sup>340</sup> Note that *jahi* in *Bg* 3.41, 43 is Kṛṣṇa’s imperative to “kill this demon,” (v41, *pāpmānaṃ prajahi hy enaṃ*) the demon being the “eternal enemy through the form of desire” (v39, *jñānino nityavairiṇā kāmarupeṇa*). Kṛṣṇa repeats the same command in *Bg* 3.43, “kill the enemy, the form of desire” (*jahi śatruṃ ... kāmarūpaṃ*).

<sup>341</sup> My translation, emphasis mine, *tvam jahi mā vyathiṣṭhā yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān*. The emphatic pronoun *tvam* singles out Arjuna, “you fight!” I translate *raṇe* as a locative of time, hence Arjuna is presently out of battle, but will be victorious when he later returns to battle.

<sup>342</sup> *mām niyojayasi*, 2ps pr. indicative causative act of *ni* + *√yuj*, “you urge me,” “you are presently causing me to yoke.” See *niyataṃ kuru karma tvam* in *Bg* 3.8.

<sup>343</sup> Aurobindo, Sri, ed., Anilbaran Roy, *The Message of the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2014), 4-7.

historical battlefield *then* and what contemporary interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching may mean *now*.

Malinar accepts both, reminding the reader that *dharmaksetrekuruḥṣetre* from *Bg* 1.1 not only indicates the field of victory or defeat but a *dharma* “arena” in which one “proves oneself a warrior.”<sup>344</sup> There is a physical struggle, but that battle’s meaning transcends the war’s limitations. Scholars such as Patton, Malinar, Mohanraj, and Bhave strike the middle ground. Drawing upon the tradition of Indian poetical aesthetics, Patton offers an alternative to traditional allegorical interpretations of violent imperatives. Patton holds *himsa* and *ahimsa* in tension without a final summative meaning (*siddhanta*) of the *Bg* as-a-whole.<sup>345</sup> Patton reads the violent passages as a dynamic comparison with Panini’s subject/counter-subject (*upameya/upamana*) model, allowing a text to advocate violence simultaneously with non-violence. Using the example of *Bg* 2.64, Patton explains that even though this text appears to be teaching self-control and may lend itself to supporting *ahimsa*, violence, nonetheless, “remains quite close to the surface.” Thus, he simultaneously supports equanimity in “dharmic violence.” Patton admits, “Indeed, in the midst of actual war such inner peace would be most essential for the warrior.”<sup>346</sup>

Mohanraj approaches the war as a mix of fact and fiction. The historicity of the *Mhba* is not irrelevant even with obvious historical fiction and unlikely details, e.g., making sense of the staggering, unsustainable numbers of combatants, the sheer size of beasts of burden, and the logistical requirement for combat support.<sup>347</sup> Mahanraj explains that Arjuna is a romanticized,

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<sup>344</sup> Malinar, *Ibid*.

<sup>345</sup> Laurie L. Patton, “The Failure of Allegory: Notes on Textual Violence and the Bhagavad Gītā” in John Renard, *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 191.

<sup>346</sup> Patton, , “The Failure of Allegory: Notes on Textual Violence and the Bhagavad Gītā”, 194.

<sup>347</sup> Mohanraj, V. M., *The Warrior and the Charioteer* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2005), 7. Mohanraj cites D. D. Kosambi regarding social and economic sustainability for the combined forces, in “Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavadgītā,” in *Myth and Reality* (Bombay: \_\_\_\_\_, 1998, 12-13.

supernatural national hero representing national, cultural, and religious ideals. It is a “mixture, not a blend,” more specifically, “an admixture of fiction and facts; rather, fiction with a dash of facts.”<sup>348</sup>

He writes,

. . . the *Bhagavadgita* was brought forth by a devastating war that marked a turning point in the history of India. However, the reader hears in those seven hundred verses, not the echo of the twang of bowstrings or that of the clank of swords, not the reverberations of the trumpeting of elephants or that of the war cry of soldiers, but a long impromptu speech on the ethical and social problems, then agitating the minds of the people, veneered with philosophy.<sup>349</sup>

Mohanraj avoids the symbolic position of over-generalizing teachings, e.g., Barbara Powell in *Windows into the Infinite* claims, “The battlefield represents life in the world.” Though Mohanraj affirms both fact and (presumed) fiction, his underlying commitment (ethics) points him beyond discussing nonphysical combat trauma. In his view, the *Bg* directs its concern to the learned caste of Brahmins, not *kṣatriyas*.

Reading the conversation as an ethical treatise is a legitimate academic pursuit, but how many Brahmins would truly understand the visceral nature of combat? After 18 days of epic warfare, *karmanīghora* and self-sacrifice have consecrated the holy field of *dharma* as the horrific field of Kuru. Other contemporary scholars have a symbolic tension between acknowledging the realities of war and the *Bg*'s significance for non-*kṣatriyas*. For example, Rosen writes, “Gita explains how to best react when confronted with such real-life hardships.”<sup>350</sup> Rosen makes a point that the “essential message” for all noncombatants is that we must fight and conquer the nonphysical foes of our lower selves as one who is fighting on “God’s behalf.”<sup>351</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>348</sup> Mohanraj, *The Warrior and the Charioteer*, 9.

<sup>349</sup> Mohanraj, *The Warrior and the Charioteer*, 27.

<sup>350</sup> Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, 27. See Powell, Barbara, *Windows into the Infinite: A Guide to the Hindu Scriptures* (Fremont: Asian Humanities Press, 1996), p 37-38.

<sup>351</sup> Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, 34.



“real end” of the dialogue desires the “transcending illusion and developing love for God.”<sup>352</sup> As a result, Rosen implies a higher, transcendent duty to “surrender” to Kṛṣṇa.

Ranchor Prime notes that a “fundamental concern” is reconciling the “apparent contradiction between sacred and profane.”<sup>353</sup> Reconciliation is a goal for all persons. Referring to the libertarian role of God in “honouring our freedom,” when war comes to us, when we make our decisions, God is the unseen impartial observer who at the same time protects us when we fail.<sup>354</sup> The benevolent nature of Kṛṣṇa’s relationship with Arjuna becomes a symbolic dialogue for all humans desiring knowledge and peace. Ranchor closes by noting the most important context.

Faced with the prospect of disaster, Arjuna’s heart says one thing and his head another. Confusion and emotion battle in his warrior’s chest. This is the context for the Bhagavad Gita. The calm voice of truth must enter like clear sunlight on a darkened road. The stage is set for Krishna to teach Arjuna, and through him all those troubled or inquisitive souls who would listen to the words of wisdom.<sup>355</sup>

For Prime (and others), the context of the *Bg* is the conflict between the voice of truth and the lure of emotions when Arjuna’s “heart says one thing and his head another.” Thus, Ranchor’s reading of the dialogue extends the scope of Kṛṣṇa’s teachings to all persons. This way is consistent with his promise to love all those who study his specific doctrines (*cf.*, *Bg* 18.70).

In contrast to Prime, Bhave affirms the importance of the immediate context, its distinct structure, and the crucial relevance of *Bg* 1.1-2.10. Bhave demonstrates the traditional Hindu divisions (6-6-6; the numeral 18 represents perfection in Hindu thought), including placement in the *Mhba*. He writes that the *Bg* is strategically structured as chapters 1-6 and then 7-18, nestled between seven martial divisions preceding and eleven divisions following. He discards the

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<sup>352</sup> Rosen, *Krishna’s Song*, 35.

<sup>353</sup> Prime, Ranchor, *Bhagavad Gītā: Talks between the Soul and God* (London: Fitzrovia, 2005), 4.

<sup>354</sup> Prime, Ranchor, *Bhagavad Gītā: Talks between the Soul and God*, 8.

<sup>355</sup> Prime, Ranchor, *Bhagavad Gītā: Talks between the Soul and God*, 10.

tradition that elevates *ahimsa* as the end goal. Arjuna is *the* man among the men of battle and combat is his distinct nature (*svadharma*). However, he relegates *yoga* of action (*karmayoga*) and the *yoga* of righteous war (*yuddhayoga*) as only a circumstance for the primary goal of teaching how Arjuna (and all warriors) will remove the “illusion” (*mohas*) that temporarily makes him combat ineffective through attachment to fleeting sensations.<sup>356</sup>

### 3.1.3 Sri Radhakrishnan

Interpreters like Radhakrishnan, Rangananthanda, and Yogananda acknowledge the combat context, but they see its highest function as representing the psychological (and spiritual) war within all humans. For example, Radhakrishnan explains that Kṛṣṇa never intended to support the “validity of warfare;” it is simply the “occasion” by which Kṛṣṇa will explain the proper understanding of all actions (including warfare).<sup>357</sup>

Radhakrishnan expounds that Arjuna’s extreme position in *Bg* 1.48 does not pertain to *jus bellum*. It addresses the specific purpose of the violent destruction of his extended kin.<sup>358</sup> The “ideal” is *ahimsa*, the state of mind and action that excludes all types of violence.<sup>359</sup> According to Radhakrishnan,

It is not possible to kill people in a state of absolute serenity or absorption in God. War is taken as an illustration. We may be obliged to do painful work but it should be done in a way that does not develop the sense of a separate ego. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that one can attain perfection even while doing one’s duties. Action done

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<sup>356</sup> Bhava, Vinoba, *Talks on the Gita*, 15-23. Fosse makes a passing comment at the conclusion of his commentary of *The BG* found in the 100,000 verse *Mhba*. See Lars Martin Fosse, *The Bhagavad Gītā: The Original Sanskrit and An English Translation* (Woodstock: YogaVidya, 2007), 175.

<sup>357</sup> Radhakrishnan, S., *The Bhagavadgītā: With an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes* (New Delhi, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2010), 73.

<sup>358</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 74.

<sup>359</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 74.

devotedly and wholeheartedly, without attachment to the results, makes for perfection. Our action must be the result of our nature.<sup>360</sup>

Ultimately, the goal is “world solidarity” (*lokasamgraha*), which all humans must strive to attain. Rather than endorsing war, Radhakrishnan refers to Śāṅkara’s teaching that the imperative to fight is not mandatory.<sup>361</sup> The emphasis, therefore, on the “aim of man” is the teaching of “personal perfection and social efficiency.”<sup>362</sup> The battle for righteousness is necessary, but the greater war is the inner struggle. Thus, “dharmaksetra is the battleground for a moral struggle.”<sup>363</sup> The “aim” is to “enforce” active righteousness (*dharma*). Therefore, true *dharma* comes from rightly informed performance, and consequently, according to *Manu* 2:19, 20, “War is a retributory judgment as well as an act of discipline. Kurukṣetra is also called *tapahksetra*, the field of penance, of discipline.”<sup>364</sup> Radhakrishnan interpreted Arjuna’s survey of the Kurus in battle formation from a symbolic perspective (*Bg* 1:14), commenting, “. . . the chariot stands for the psychophysical vehicle. The steeds are the senses, the reins their controls, but the charioteer, the guide, is the spirit or real self, *ātman*. Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, is the Spirit in us.”<sup>365</sup> Therefore, when the arrows flew and the battle began, Arjuna perceived the “struggle” to mean that “his whole scheme of life” and the deeply ingrained value system for family and teacher “will have to be abandoned.”<sup>366</sup> Consequently, the inevitable slaughter takes on a double significance as he will “slay the symbols of this external morality and develop inward strength,” so that having slain his preceptors, he will be able to “develop the wisdom of the soul.”<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 74.

<sup>361</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 75.

<sup>362</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 454.

<sup>363</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 87.

<sup>364</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 88.

<sup>365</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 94.

<sup>366</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 96.

<sup>367</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 102.

Radhakrishnan explains Arjuna’s perplexity in *Bg* 1.46, regarding the value of human life on and off the battlefield, “. . . wives and children, teachers and kinsmen, are dear not for their own sake but for the sake of the Self.”<sup>368</sup> Hesitantly, he symbolizes humanity on the evolutionary precipice of higher self-realization. The impossibility to “kill people in a state of absolute serenity” aligns with viewing Kṛṣṇa’s teaching as an impossible ideal to indefinitely maintain because any war in a *dharma*-deficient *Kali Yuga* will always end in an imperfect action. Per Brock and Lettini’s question regarding adequate preparation for killing in combat, Radhakrishnan would answer, ‘No.’ The inability to kill with perfect peace means there is no satisfactory spiritual or psychological preparation for battle in the *Kali Yuga*.

## 3.2 Commitment to A Political Reading

### 3.2.1 Mohandas Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi is the most well-known political commentator on the *Bg*, and there is tension in his thought regarding the purpose of the combat context.<sup>369</sup> Like many early 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian nationalist intellectuals, Gandhi found himself between the British “imperial ideology of difference” that undergirded their introduction of European liberalism to India and the growing Indian consciousness and unwillingness to accept their fate.<sup>370</sup> He dreamed of a non-colonial India with “alternative futures” determined by Indian spirituality and society.<sup>371</sup> However, rather than

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<sup>368</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 106.

<sup>369</sup> A fakir is a religious ascetic living on alms. Gandhi remained life-long friends with E. Stanley Jones who is was the greatest western Wesleyan Christian missionary, some argue in the history of Christian missions to India. Jones attempted the difficult paradox of interpreting the person of Gandhi in, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press: 1948). A personally touching book, however, is his little book, *Ghandi: Portrayal of a Friend* (Abingdon Press: 1983).

<sup>370</sup> Stegger, Manfred B, *Gandhi’s Dilemma: Nonviolent Principles and Nationalist Power* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 22.

<sup>371</sup> Francis P. Hutchinson discusses the power of education to determine the futures of societies in *Educating Beyond Violent Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

turning to violence, Gandhi saw the path of active nonviolence through *satyagraha*. Marjorie Hope and James Young write concerning the disciple of Gandhi, Shantidas, *satyagraha* “required more daring, a greater spirit of sacrifice, more discipline, and more hope. *Satyagraha* produced a profound transformation in those who practiced it, and sometimes a dramatic conversion of those against whom it was carried out.”<sup>372</sup> Gandhi saw the supreme teaching as “truth is God and God is truth.” These seven words were the “core” of Gandhi’s life, expressed through his understanding of *ahimsa*.<sup>373</sup>

Unfortunately, there is little to be learned from his commentary on the opening scene of *Bg 1*, for the combat context is by and largely skipped. However, the combat context had its role in Gandhian thinking and the emphasis on *ahimsa*. Gandhi presents an allegorical interpretation by understanding the battle of the soul supported by an “unrealistic juxtaposition of the battlefield and philosophical discussion.”<sup>374</sup> However, Gier charts, while holding firm that the goal is for all people to become incapable of anger, at the same time, Gandhi retains a literalist interpretation by conceding that violence is unavoidable for warriors like Arjuna.<sup>375</sup> Yet, Gandhi wrote in his introduction to his commentary,

. . . I felt that it was not a historical work, but, that, under the guise of physical warfare, it [the BG ] described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Hope, Marjorie and Young, James, *The Struggle for Humanity: Agents of Nonviolent Change in a Violent World* (Marryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 47. Gandhi rejected his earlier passive expression of the term, nonviolence, for a active expression, “nonviolent activity,” in Todd May, *Nonviolent Resistance: a philosophical introduction* (Malden: Polity Press, 2015), 34.

<sup>373</sup> Chekki, Dan A., “Some Traditions of Nonviolence and Peace,” *International Journal on World Peace* 10, no. 3 (September 1993), 47-54.

<sup>374</sup> Contra Gier, Richard F., *The Virtue of Nonviolence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>375</sup> Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence*, 38.

<sup>376</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, ed. John Stohmeier, *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2009), xvii.

Relegating the historicity of the events to the status of a fictional legend, Gandhi validates the descriptions of violent, gory combat-action as graphic sensory details meant to elucidate the age-long struggle of humanity's passionate heart affirming the "futility" and not the "necessity of warfare."<sup>377</sup> Yet, Gandhi admits the possibility of committing violent, gory combat with indifference to results.

Let it be granted that, according to the letter of the Gita, it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after forty years' unremitting endeavor fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.<sup>378</sup>

Gandhi's experience as a teacher led him to ultimately conclude that complete disregard is only through "perfect observance" of non-violence (*ahimsa*). Therefore, regarding the possibility of spiritually preparing a warrior for the killing act, Gandhi would most likely conclude that though Kṛṣṇa instructs and empowers Arjuna to do so with complete indifference to results, it is impossible to live out.

Paradoxically, Gandhi supported disciplined training for young males through military service so that they may return one day to civilian life with more robust manhood. Arafaat A. Valliani comments that Gandhi was "convinced that the emergence of a cowardly, physically weak, and an emasculated Hindu male significantly enabled British colonization of India."<sup>379</sup> Thus, strenuous manual labor, military training, or *yoga* and breathing are highly beneficial to Gandhi's doctrine of 'soul force.' Valliani concludes, "Such somatic control was indispensable to being able

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<sup>377</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi*, xvii, ed.

<sup>378</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Gandhi*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>379</sup> Valliani, Arafaat A., "Recuperating Indian masculinity: Mohandas Gandhi, war and the Indian diaspora in South Africa (1899-1914)," *South Asian History and Culture* 5, no4, 2014, 505.

to wield ‘soul force’ in the political field and simultaneously uphold the ethical ideals of *satyagraha*.<sup>380</sup>

Santhanam writes, Gandhi “attached to physical health and well-being as much importance as to plain and logical thinking or moral responsibility.”<sup>381</sup> Therefore, a “soul-force” is a non-violent “embodied force.”<sup>382</sup> *Ahimsa* is the reality behind man’s ultimate search to grasp truth (*satyagraha*). Agehananda Bharati reminds us that the “genesis” of *ahimsa* is neither Jainism nor Buddhism, but the “*obiter dictum*” of King Yudhiṣṭhira in the context of the *Mhba—ahimsa paramo dharma*.<sup>383</sup>

Bondurant writes, “Gandhi . . . identifies *ahimsa* and love,” with love being “the active state of *ahimsa*.”<sup>384</sup> This love action required training, just like the military art of war. Gandhi writes,

“Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence.... The votary of non-violence cultivates the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear.... He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice *ahimsa* to perfection.”<sup>385</sup>

Gandhi’s position of *himsa* for some and *ahimsa* as the ultimate goal for all is a significant commitment to reading the *Bg* in its *Mhbn* combat context.<sup>386</sup> While non-violence was the highest

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<sup>380</sup> Valliana, 509, citing Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 16. Unintentionally, the regional peace as a result of “Pax Britannica” led to the decline of Indian masculinity. Why would one need *Kṣatriyas* if one had the might of the British Army and Navy?

<sup>381</sup> Santhanam, K, “Basic Principles of Gandhism,” in Ramachandran and Mahadevan, *Gandhi: His Relevance for our Time* (Berkeley: World with out war Publishers, 1967), 308.

<sup>382</sup> Villiani, “Recuperating Indian Masculinity,” 509.

<sup>383</sup> Bharati, Agehananda, “Contemporary Interpretations of Ahimsa,” in Ramachandran and Mahadevan, *Gandhi*, 334. *Ahimsa paramo dharma* is loosely, “nonviolence is the highest duty.” Bharati provides a contemporary (yet Mahabharata logically contextual) definition of *ahimsa*: “*ahimsa—nonviolence—is an attitude held by a person in the majority of his inter-personal activities; the attitude of consciously inflicting no harm, or as little harm as possible, on other human beings.*” (338)

<sup>384</sup> Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 24.

<sup>385</sup> Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 29, Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> The power of nonviolence is the transformation of the individual practitioner, the envelopment of the masses as a true nonviolent and disciplined body politik, likewise the transformation of the oppressor and the elevation of the

ethic, Gandhi did not dismiss the combat context. On the contrary, he recognized and advocated the value of combat training.

### 3.2.2 Ranganathananda

Other politically motivated traditions warrant consideration. Political interpreters used the historical context to energize a nation toward self-rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Twentieth-century nationalists saw a great call to assert their unique philosophy and culture so that Indians may break free from the yoke of British imperialism. Indian scholars and reformers encouraged a mandate in Kṛṣṇa's words to India that her people may liberate their nation from colonial rule through action. For example, Swami Ranganathananda writes in his introduction,

In the past, people mostly read the Gita as a pious act, and for a little peace of mind. We never realized that this is a book of intense practicality, that this is the greatest

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interaction to a plain alternative to physical aggression. Nojeim, J. Michael, *Gandhi and King*, 31-33. Nojeim explains that a *satyagrahi* must (1) Live a pure and desire free life (2) Live a life dedicated to the welfare of all (especially the neediest) (3) Live a simple life (107). Nojeim includes other facets: desirelessness, nonpossession, controlling the palate, celibacy, service toward others, Hindu-Muslim unity, helping the poor, ending the caste system (especially that which deems people as 'untouchable), women's dignity, spiritual (ashramic) lives (107-121). Hence, "nonviolence" becomes "in effect a sort of language, a means of communicating feelings and ideas." See Charles Gregory, *The Psychology and Strategy of Gandhi's Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1972), 54, citing W. H. R. Rivers in *Instinct and the Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 93. He cites that such an approach is as a function of the unconscious, no less a form of "manipulative activity." It is a true justice, rather than a justice that is simply a reassertion of one's own (nation's) exclusive claim to truth at the detriment of another group (be they five or a billion). See discussion on page 52 of Lanza de Vasto's *Warriors of Peace: Writings on the Technique of Nonviolence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974). This suggestion of justice seems to imply a nonobjective view of truth. Justice is both the foundation of peace and the primary cause of war. Yet, *ahimsa* is a term sparingly used by the author of the *Bg*. It appears in 10:4-5, 13:7-9, and 16:1-3 in a list of negative and positive virtues. As a virtue, one may conclude that it is not extolled by the author in any greater significance than other virtues or states of being. In Gandhi's commentary, he gives no commentary regarding the significance, the location, or the implication of *ahimsa* among or above other desired virtues. See Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*, ed. Stohmeier, 131, 156, 177. See also, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*, translated by Mahadev Desai (Blacksburg: Wilder Publications, Inc., 2011). Fowler translates *ahimsa* as "non-injury," so also Deutsch (Deutsch, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 88), and Fosse, "nonviolence" (Fosse, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 94), concluding that this attribute list is *gūṇic*, representative of all possible types of "potentials of reality" originating from Brahman. She concludes that *ahimsa* "could hardly be a major doctrine of the text" considering the upcoming "carnage," Fowler, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 174. Nonetheless, propelled by Ghandi's sheer determination and "soul force," *ahimsa* became the identifying mark of a mass movement bringing independence and political liberation to hundreds of millions of Indians from colonialism while sparing the masses from what would have been years of brutal revolution.



book of practical Vedanta capable of helping us to create a society of fully developed human beings.<sup>387</sup>

A disciple of Vivekananda, Ranganathananda observed what he called a widespread misunderstanding across India. He pointed out a particular encounter in Hyderabad with the military governor, General J. N. Chowdhury. After an hour and a half of interrupted conversation (Chowdhury was forced to attend military affairs related to a communist insurrection), Ranganathananda noticed a copy of the *Bg* on the table. He inquired if the General read the *Bg*. Chowdhury responds, “Of course, when I feel tired and want to find some peace of mind, I read a few lines from the Gita.” Ranganathananda responds, “That is not its purpose.” Chowdhury responds in two successive interchanges, “Do you mean to say that this book has other values than merely giving us a little peace of mind? Do you mean to say that this book has relevance to me as a Military Governor of this State?” Ranganathananda responds to both questions in succession,

Yes, that book is not meant merely to give peace of mind; it is meant to give you strength to serve the people, to make you a responsible citizen. It contains a comprehensive philosophy of life and work. We must realize that men and women of action, of responsibility, have the need for a philosophy of life and action. The Gita provides that philosophy calling it by the simple word, “Yoga.”<sup>388</sup>

Based on *Bg* 4:1, Ranganathananda explains how Kṛṣṇa gave his Yoga to “men of responsibility” to “serve and protect the people, to nourish the people.” Ranganathananda ends, “This is the purpose of this great book ... It is not meant for putting you to sleep. It is meant to wake you up ... It is to give you that tremendous humanistic impulse and resolve, to work for the good of all in society.”<sup>389</sup> Ranganathananda recognized the practical application of the combat context because he understood that “men and women of action” require a “philosophy of life and action.”

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<sup>387</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, vol. 1, 10.

<sup>388</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, vol. 1, 11.

<sup>389</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, vol. 1, 11.

### 3.2.3 Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Early nationalist movements focused in and around Bengal and Maharashtra. Bal Gangadhar Tilak justified political violence by men who acted in a manner consistent with Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Tilak wrote in his journal as a defense of the assassination of Afzal Khan (a Muslim commander) by the Maratha resistance leader, Shivaji, "Shrimat Krishna's teaching in the Bhagavad Gita is to kill even our teachers and our kinsmen. No blame attaches to any person if he is doing deeds without being motivated by a desire to reap the fruit of his deeds."<sup>390</sup> Tilak implies that such action may be acceptable and necessary in contemporary society. Running through all Indian nationalist movements, nonviolent or militaristic, is a strong encouragement from inaction to *Gītā*-based-action.

### 3.2.4 Aurobindo Ghosh

The final Indian nationalist leader is the western-educated Aurobindo Ghosh. Ghosh claimed to have received an encounter with Kṛṣṇa, who placed the *Bg* into his hands. Ghosh asserted that Kṛṣṇa explained the universal significance of India's purpose in sharing the true Sanatana Dharma (eternal principles) with the world.<sup>391</sup> Sharpe notes that the poem's length was easily readable and printable for the growing literate masses, and it powerfully portrayed the role of Kṛṣṇa as a leader of men. The *Bg*'s brevity, elegant prose, and sophisticated content focused the reader's being toward a singular, multifaceted end goal.<sup>392</sup> Sharpe writes,

. . . one of its central teachings was the doctrine of *nishkama karma*, or selfless endeavor. This in the situation of the time was the ideal complement to personal

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<sup>390</sup> Sharpe, *The Universal Gita*, 72.

<sup>391</sup> Sharpe, *The Universal Gita*, 79.

<sup>392</sup> Sharpe, *The Universal Gita*, 76.

devotion to Krishna—a total commitment to the cause of the restoration of *dharma*, that cause with which Krishna himself had always been identified as an *avatara*.<sup>393</sup>

The passionate political ideals of patriotic Indians (seen by the British as brigands) merged into a new national pride and identity, portraying Kṛṣṇa as a national hero and Arjuna as the example of *dharma* obedience and devotion. Sharpe summarizes this inspired revolutionary political ideology in four parts. First, real Indian patriots must fight like Arjuna to restore *dharma* (and India). Secondly, violence is permitted and justified, and the rules of engagement are clear in *The Laws of Manu*. Second, the British government constitutes an inherent danger to the safety of all Indians. Therefore, overthrowing imperialistic oppression warrants appropriate force. Thirdly, the British are no different from Arjuna's historical enemies at Kurukṣetra. Therefore, no weapon can harm their true selves. Fourthly, there are no negative *karma* consequences to actions of equanimity when adequately directed to Kṛṣṇa. Finally, Kṛṣṇa-*avatara* restored *dharma*, so India functions as an *avatara* to restore *dharma* for the world.<sup>394</sup>

## Summary

In the end, we have the *Bg* as it is in its final form in its *Mhbn* combat context. In this chapter, I have critically reviewed dominant commentators in Hindu Studies by categorizing them as symbolic (symbolic with tension) and political. I examined how hermeneutical commitments impacted their understanding of the combat context. Traditions that read the *Bg* for its symbolic meaning may miss how the epic offers a vast treasure trove of insight into nonphysical traumas from the material war. In the following chapter, I provide examples from the *Droṇa Parvann* of various physical and psychological traumatic phenomena at Kurukṣetra.

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<sup>393</sup> Sharpe, Eric, *The Universal Gita*, 77.

<sup>394</sup> Sharpe, Eric, *The Universal Gita*, 83-84.

## **Part 2**

### **Study**

## Chapter 4

### Kurukṣetre: Re-reading the Violent, Gory *Dharma* Field of Battle

#### Introduction

Imagine Kurukṣetre. The climactic scene of “violent, gory combat” (*karmaṇighora*) in the *Kali Yuga* is the canvas for heroes commonly described as “grinders of *kṣatriyas*.”<sup>395</sup> We who do not intimately know war and its costs must imagine the battlefield. The *Mhba* is meticulously detailed and graphic in its account. The following is a survey of selected phenomenology of the battlefield. I focus on the *Droṇa Parvan*, and my goal is to provide an overview of the most common nonphysical combat-related phenomena due to the impact of *karmaṇighora*.

#### 4.1 Paradox of Beauty

##### 4.1.1 Symphony of *Ghore*

Kurukṣetre is a symphony of gore. Sañjaya’s highly detailed narration emphasizes the carnage,<sup>396</sup> describing the number of beheadings,<sup>397</sup> the cruel acts of war,<sup>398</sup> men’s teeth clenching upper and lower lips, and their eyes wide open in rage.<sup>399</sup> Trunkless bodies litter the battlefield,<sup>400</sup> and rivers of blood<sup>401</sup> carry severed fingers floating in the current like tiny fish.<sup>402</sup> The blood-

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<sup>395</sup> I infer from the locative *karmani* in *Bg* 3.1 the sense of “combat” based on context of the forthcoming battle. Kuru Field is not only the field of *dharma*, but also the place where *jnana* is insufficient without indifference (*same*) to *karma*. Therefore, at times, for the purpose of consistency translate all terms like *karmaṇighora* (“violent, gory combat”), *dharma* (duty), *yuga*, in their italicized transliteration form. See the following for various examples *Abhīmanyu-badha Parvan*, XLVI, 102; Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 198; *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXI, 371, CLXI, 372, CLXIV, 379, CLXX, 392, CLXXI, 395, CLXXII, 397, CLXXXVI, 434, CLXXXVIII, 439, CXCIII, 450, CXCVI, 459, CCI, 474.

<sup>396</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLII, 341-342; CLX, 370. See also *Karna Parvan*, 27.

<sup>397</sup> Ganguli, K.M., *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 182, XCVI, 193, CXVIII, 249, CLXXI, 395

<sup>398</sup> *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 436, CLXXXVII, 437, CXCIII, 450,

<sup>399</sup> *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXI, 395

<sup>400</sup> *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 249

<sup>401</sup> Ganguli, K.M., *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 182, CVII, 218, CXL, 303; *Karna Parvan*, 30.

<sup>402</sup> Ganguli, K.M., *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 183.

soaked battlefield<sup>403</sup> became impassable mires of mud and flesh,<sup>404</sup> and the blood of horses and elephants mixed with men's blood.<sup>405</sup> Broken chariots and mounds of elephant carcasses resembled hills;<sup>406</sup> the cries of the wounded overshadowed the anguish of those in hell.<sup>407</sup> Yet, musical instruments filled the air<sup>408</sup> as friends, family, and enemies killed each other without distinction in the chaos of nightfall.<sup>409</sup> Many *kṣatriyas* momentarily lost their capacity to reason and control themselves within such scenes and became obsessed with madness.<sup>410</sup>

The *Mhba* compares the extreme ferocity of the war to the universal destruction at the end of the *Kali Yuga*.<sup>411</sup> The *Mhba*'s accounts of heroes "grinding" their enemies, or a hero as a "grinder of *kṣatriyas*," harkens back to Arjuna's vision in *Bg* 11.26-28, whereby Kṛṣṇa ground in his teeth kings, friends, and foes.<sup>412</sup> The daily butcher's bill renewed a buffet for carrion beasts and mythical creatures who feasted on flesh and drank their fill of blood.<sup>413</sup> The effect of the carnage made brave men timid and joyous men cheerless with great fear.<sup>414</sup> It was a level of death never witnessed by seasoned veterans.<sup>415</sup> It is reminiscent of what Marilyn McCall Adams described as "dysteleological" and "horrendous evil." However, Kuru Field was never a battle with a pointless ending."

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<sup>403</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 183.

<sup>404</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 249, CLX, 370

<sup>405</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLIII, 343-344

<sup>406</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 198.

<sup>407</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXI, 394.

<sup>408</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CVII, 218.

<sup>409</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIX, 390.

<sup>410</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLIII, 343-344.

<sup>411</sup> For the theme of ferocity, see Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIX, 390. See also CXXXV, 266, CXLIV, 322. Kurukṣetra likened to the dwelling of Yama, CXXXI, 282.

<sup>412</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 395, CLXXXVI, 434.

<sup>413</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLVIII, 106, XCII, 182, XCVI, 193

<sup>414</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 355.

<sup>415</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIV, 378.

On the contrary, Kuru Field had a *telos*, and Arjuna’s combat-effectiveness was the means to Kṛṣṇa’s ultimate purpose (*Bg* 11:23-33). The symphony of this carnage is unified throughout the *Mhba* by the common theme of time. Time is the inescapable reality that all creatures will be destroyed *over time*, the sense of destiny and fate in the battle, but also, in light of *Bg* 11.32, Kṛṣṇa’s identification, “I am Time, the [all] powerful cause of the destruction of the worlds.”<sup>416</sup>

#### 4.1.2 The Beautiful Scene of *Karmanighora*

In contrast to the gore, the *Mhba* also describes *Dharmakṣetra-Kurukṣetra* appearing as “second heaven.”<sup>417</sup> The battlefield glistened with kings and princes who laid dead in the field with their various ornaments, nose rings, bracelets, necklaces, jewels, flora, headdresses, earrings, and gold-inlaid weapons and chariots. The beautiful sight befitted their understanding of a beautiful *dharma*-sacrifice of life.<sup>418</sup> Examples of gore abound. For instance, severed heads appeared as beautiful lotuses floating on a lake.<sup>419</sup> The torches illuminated the night battle, which made the scene appear serene.<sup>420</sup> Sañjaya likened heroes pierced by thousands of arrows to beautiful porcupines.<sup>421</sup> The sightings of duels between great *kṣatriyas* were “exceedingly

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<sup>416</sup> The Greek, συμφωνίας, means “all of the sounds sounding in unison.” Arjuna is commanded to be Kṛṣṇa’s agent of wrath. See *Bg* 11.33, *nimittamātraṃ bhava*. I translate *nimitta* as ‘agent,’ for an agent of Kṛṣṇa automatically conveys instrumentality (Sargeant, 485; Tsoukalas, 244; Dutt, 95). Sargeant provides the option of “material cause,” while Tsoukalas’ lexicon offers “mere efficient cause.” The latter may imply a simplicity to co-mission. The material is undoubtedly his body. Regarding v32, there is a strong sense of agency inferred from *lokakṣayakṛt* (m. n. s. cpd). As a nominative, it is not a neuter like “power,” or “force,” but *is* the “I am Time,” nominatives both. Thus, Tsoukalas infers agency (240). See also Fowler, 199, “I am world-destroying Time grown full.” Fowler captures the progression of all senses of time as accounted in the *Mhba*. Furthermore, “grown full” captures the sense of “work” from the root  $\sqrt{kr}$ . Furthermore, I would disagree with Dutt’s translation “I am (now) the full manifestation of Death, the Destroyer of worlds.” While it also conveys personal agency, he downplays *asmi kalas* by way of substituting the explicit reading with the insertion of ‘now’ in parentheses. Thus, he may have overlooked a significant and consistent theme illumined by a specific name for Kṛṣṇa. Hence, I see Sargeant’s translation, “the cause,” possibly inferring a neuter sense in the greater context (484).

<sup>417</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXII, 375. The differing final letters denote the nominative (*Dharma ...a*) and the locative (*Dharma ... e*).

<sup>418</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVII, 331-332.

<sup>419</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 14, 15

<sup>420</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 376.

<sup>421</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIX 388.

wonderful.”<sup>422</sup> The appearance of Sātyaki drenched in blood appeared to all as “exceedingly resplendent.”<sup>423</sup> Sañjaya described the scene of indistinguishably charred Pāṇḍavas as a vision of beauty.<sup>424</sup>

The *Mhba* glorifies *kṣatriya*’s commitment to *dharma* while not glossing over the brutal nature of the combat. The scent of excrement trampled into the muck by thousands of horses and elephants enhanced the fragrance of the battlefield. The “battle piss” or “watery bowls” of millions of men soaked the ground.<sup>425</sup> This phenomenon occurred before the battle in the example of Arjuna’s oath to kill Jayadratha, whereby the mere knowledge of Arjuna’s promise caused omens in the sky, extreme agitation, and horses and elephants to “eject urine and excrement.”<sup>426</sup> It happened amidst the high point of a duel when Bhīma’s war cry against Droṇa caused *kṣatriyas* to drop the content of their bowls along with horses and elephants.<sup>427</sup> The involuntary and *shared* response to combat is a meta-trauma of the lesser men.<sup>428</sup> This insertion of spontaneous bowel movements is not necessary to the plot of the *Mhba*. However, it enhances the historical value of the narrative while also functioning to convey more precisely the encompassing impact upon the men who fought over those 18 days. Even if the *Mhba* is an entirely fictional narrative, the author(s) knew something about war (e.g., battle piss) that very few warriors share with non-veterans.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 403.

<sup>423</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXV, 243.

<sup>424</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 480.

<sup>425</sup> Ganguli’s term is *excreta*.

<sup>426</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVII, 149. Ghaṭōtkaca causes elephants to tremble in fear. See *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 414.

<sup>427</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVIII, 275. Ghaṭōtkaca’s lion-like roar causes elephants to urinate. See *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 405,

<sup>428</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIV, 240-241, CLV, 350.

<sup>429</sup> See Grossman, *On Killing* and *On Combat*.



### 4.1.3 The Environmental Phenomenology at Kurukṣetra

The wonders above and below bore witness to the *karmaṇighora* at *Dharmakṣetra-Kurukṣetra*. In one scene, the *kṣatriyas* engaged in combat complimented the sky's heavenly wonders even though they became disoriented from a thick cloud of dust. They waded through feces, urine, mud, blood, guts, shattered bodies and scattered appendages, the labyrinth of broken chariots and slain horses, and elephants mixed with burning human flesh.<sup>430</sup> The many torches illumined the night-fighting like the beautiful starry sky.<sup>431</sup> The sounds reached the heavens, and the heavenly realm responded.<sup>432</sup> *Kṣatriyas* keenly observed the omens in the sky that could foretell the outcome of battles, such as the “auspicious omens” on the day preceding the death of Jayadratha.<sup>433</sup>

It was common to find animal-kind and environmental responses preceding great battles and duels.<sup>434</sup> For example, the fighting skill of Arjuna caused the universe to take witness to the wonder of his prowess.<sup>435</sup> On another occasion, an invisible voice praises the duel between Droṇa and Arjuna.<sup>436</sup> In another scene, in response to the skill of Droṇa's son, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa invoked the *agneya* (heavenly gifted) weapon, which caused meteors to fall from the sky, a thick gloom to veil the advancing Pāṇḍava army, and darkness to fill every inch of the battlefield. Spiritual beings (*rakshasas* and *pisachas*) fiercely cried, unfavorable winds blew, the temperature changed, ravens croaked, billows rolled, blood rained down upon the battlefield, and birds and beasts panicked

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<sup>430</sup> The report of the disorienting presence of dust contributes to acts of *adharma*. It is so far undetermined if Vyāsa meant this as a metaphor, but, nonetheless, it reminds me of the oft translated “cloud” of Arjuna's delusion (*mohas*).

<sup>431</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 437.

<sup>432</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 436.

<sup>433</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVII, 149. The omens are not infallible to the outcome. They primarily serve as a reference of and for the reader a reminder to the great, upcoming event.

<sup>434</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXVIII, 171.

<sup>435</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVII, 198.

<sup>436</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVIII, 440.

where they stood.<sup>437</sup> The wonder of the heavenly realm was not only a witness but a participant of the battle. For instance, when men heard the reception of thousands of slain *kṣatriyas* receiving their heavenly reward, the celebration compelled them to fight in such a way that they attained heaven (by killing or being killed).<sup>438</sup> Thus, directly and indirectly, the environment contributed to the disordering of men’s combat readiness and effectiveness.

#### 4.1.4 Association with the Kṛṣṇa the “Destroyer” and “Yuga Fire”

The text compares combat to the fires that burn the material world at the end of the *Kali Yuga* and the role of Kṛṣṇa as the agent of universal destruction.<sup>439</sup> Kurukṣetra resembled the scene of the defeat at the end of the *Kali Yuga*.<sup>440</sup> The earth seemed to be a firestorm in that battle, like the moment of “universal destruction.”<sup>441</sup> Great *kṣatriyas*, like Abhīmanyu, route the Kuru army and are referred to as the “Destroyer” at the time of universal dissolution.<sup>442</sup> So Arjuna speeds toward Jayadratha, “like the Destroyer himself.”<sup>443</sup> So also Bhima, when he races toward Droṇa, mace in hand.<sup>444</sup> So also, Karna when he is in a frenzy.<sup>445</sup>

Other great warriors were described as the “Destroyer himself with wide-open mouth.”<sup>446</sup> So also, Droṇa.<sup>447</sup> The epic depicts Rama’s foes as already “in the jaws of death,” which I take to be a reference to Arjuna’s vision of Kṛṣṇa’s *rūpamaiśvara* (see *Bg* 11).<sup>448</sup> Allies viewed Arjuna,<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 479.

<sup>438</sup> *Karna Parvan*, 49.

<sup>439</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXV, 381

<sup>440</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXV, 266.

<sup>441</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIII, 376

<sup>442</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLIII, 96.

<sup>443</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCIX, 202

<sup>444</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVI, 271, CLIV, 346, CLXI, 373, CLXIV, 378,

<sup>445</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 291

<sup>446</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CV, 213, CXLIV, 315, CLXIX, 388

<sup>447</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXV, 243

<sup>448</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXX, 134, CLXX, 391

<sup>449</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 197, CXLIV, 320,

Sātyaki,<sup>450</sup> Droṇa, and Droṇa’s son, Aswatthaman,<sup>451</sup> as a raging “yuga fire.”<sup>452</sup> The destructive nature of Bhīma’s “dart” is like the “splendor of the Yuga-fire.”<sup>453</sup> Weaker-hearted fighters compared the “Two Kṛṣṇas” to “the jaws of Rahu” and “yuga-suns risen” in the sky.<sup>454</sup> Sātyaki’s charioteer likens his companion to “The Destroyer himself as he appears at the end of the Yuga.”<sup>455</sup> Karna looked like Agni consuming all the creatures at the universal destruction of the world.<sup>456</sup>

The *Mhba* describes Ghaṭōtkaca as evoking terror like a “blazing mouth,” like “the Destroyer himself” (caused by a magical illusion).<sup>457</sup> More references include Ghaṭōtkaca smiling with a “blazing mouth,” “sharp teeth,” and a celestial “dart” compared to the “tongue of the Destroyer.”<sup>458</sup> Likewise, Aswatthaman’s arrows resembled the “burning of all creatures at the end of the Yuga.”<sup>459</sup>

However, extreme carnage is not always harmful. Great heroes use this imagery to bolster their men and reduce fears. For example, Duryodhana rallies his army in their retreat by boasting that he will resemble “the Destroyer himself at the end of the Yuga” when he duels Phalguna (Arjuna). He pleads for them to stay in the fight and “remove” their fears of Phalguna.<sup>460</sup> Finally, Vyāsa tells Yudhiṣṭhira to not “yield to anger” and “do not set your heart on grief” because this is the end of all creatures of this world.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIX, 250, CXXXVIX, 302

<sup>451</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 353

<sup>452</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XC, 178, XCIV, 190, see Karna, CXXXVIII, 298,

<sup>453</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIII, 238, 239

<sup>454</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, C, 202; “two blazing fires,” 203

<sup>455</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 249

<sup>456</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 365.

<sup>457</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 350

<sup>458</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 407 CLXXV, 407 CLXXIII, 401.

<sup>459</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 354

<sup>460</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 365

<sup>461</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIII, 427.

## 4.2 Warcraft

The *Mhba* references proper and improper conduct. It begins with the presumption that combat is *the* duty of a *kṣatriya*.<sup>462</sup> The common appellation, “high-souled warrior,” described the gravitas of a *kṣatriya*, his skill at arms (lethality), and his commitment to the understood rules of engagement. Likewise, themes of duty and chivalry are common.<sup>463</sup>

References to the refinement and perfection of their warcraft appear throughout the epic. Subjects and lesser *kṣatriyas* expected kings to be appropriate examples of their caste-dictated craft. The *guṇas* of passion and ignorance could blind great men to proper protocols. For example, following the scene of the *Bg* but before hostilities, only the renowned Dharma King, Yudhiṣṭhira, remembered his pre-war mandate. In the episode, Yudhiṣṭhira removed his armor and weapons and approached his preceptor for his blessing (Droṇa). Failure to do so would have severely insulted his beloved preceptors, which could have ended in defeat. In asking for Droṇa’s blessing, Yudhiṣṭhira received assurances of victory. Having done so, he leads his army toward the fray, “Come! Strike! Rush!”<sup>464</sup>

In another example, Sātyaki referenced the sense of duty and adherence to the *kṣatriya* code in his encouragement to Somadatta to remain committed to the fight.<sup>465</sup> So also, brave kings would not allow themselves to retreat in the face of a terrible attack by Ghaṭōtkaca because of their nobility and fidelity to a *kṣatriya* code of conduct.<sup>466</sup> On occasion, many fighters embraced the code seeking a good death by committing themselves to fight honorably with their opponents,

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<sup>462</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXIV, 265. See also *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, 360, CLXXXIII, 425.

<sup>463</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXC, 443, CXCII, 447, CXCIV, 468.

<sup>464</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan, Parvan*, CXXII, 261. But, where are his four brothers? They are surprised and questioned his actions. Their lack of awareness implies that they are already under the domination of the *guṇas* the *Bg*.

<sup>465</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 348

<sup>466</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 416.

keeping the soteriological benefit (“heaven”) in view as they eagerly slew one another.<sup>467</sup> Not only was it a means of reaching the end of re-birth, but Aśvatthāmā also referenced it as a resource for grief. Despite his conviction of his father’s (Droṇa ) treacherous death, he encouraged others not to mourn for him, echoing the generalization that a *kṣatriya* always desires a good warrior’s death.<sup>468</sup>

Finally, *kṣatriyas*, who were well-skilled, displayed great pride in the refinement of their warcraft.<sup>469</sup> Ganguli translates, “Warriors, skilled in battle, accomplished in weapons, and firmly resolved in the fight, struggled vigorously in combat, solicitous only of fame.”<sup>470</sup> For example, Abhīmanyu’s body appeared invisible beneath his armor when he exercised such great skill at arms.<sup>471</sup> In another example, Jalasandha was a smooth and efficient operator.<sup>472</sup> In another, Kṛṣṇa called upon the best of Ghaṭōtkaca’s fighting ability against Karna.<sup>473</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Highly Trained and Lethal Men at Arms

Kurukṣetra was not a one-sided war. The *Mhba* vividly describes the skill and courage of the Kurus. The text compliments Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s martial forces, who were eager for a fight after beholding the [Pāṇḍu] army.”<sup>474</sup> There are multiple references to the willingness and positioning

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<sup>467</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXC, 441. The term, soteriological, is not intended to be a conflation of western Christianity and Hinduisim. Using it I infer notional similarity only, for, to the ultimate goal on Hinduism is *mokṣa* which is the end of re-birth (*samṣara*).

<sup>468</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCVI, 458. See *Bg* 2.37. His survival should not be perceived differently than his demise.

<sup>469</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVIII, 334, CLVII, 360, CCI, 478. Warcraft or “science of arms” is a pride of a *kṣatriya* (*Karna Parvan* 10, 21).

<sup>470</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVI, 193. Such

<sup>471</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLII, 96.

<sup>472</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIV, 241.

<sup>473</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 400.

<sup>474</sup> For martial forces, see *māmakāḥ; vyūḍham* (*Bg* 1.2, 3); *samavetā yuyutsavaḥ. pāṇḍavānīkaḥ* (*Bg* 1.2); *paśyaitāḥ pāṇḍuputrāṇām acārya mahatīm camūm vyūḍhām* (*Bg* 1.3). Sañjaya tells his master to “behold” the great army.”

of both armies.<sup>475</sup> In both armies, grandfathers, fathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, and in-laws all stood together in anticipation of the war.<sup>476</sup> They are approached each other with the intent and desire to engage in a fight.<sup>477</sup> Men confronted each other with the intention of killing,<sup>478</sup> ready to give up their lives and the wealth they collected over a lifetime from prior victories.<sup>479</sup> The repeated descriptions and accolades record their bravery, but they also provide a damning contrast to Arjuna’s *dharma* crisis in *Bg* 1. Taken as a whole, they represent the standard expectation of behavior.

Sañjaya describes the Kuru men as skilled in battle with courage, fame, and heroic reputation.<sup>480</sup> They were all mighty warriors and archers,<sup>481</sup> equal in action to the Pāṇḍavas,<sup>482</sup> valorous,<sup>483</sup> strong as bulls,<sup>484</sup> distinguished,<sup>485</sup> competent leaders,<sup>486</sup> victorious,<sup>487</sup> and proficient in various weapons.<sup>488</sup> They risked their lives to protect their comrades,<sup>489</sup> and they were sufficient

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<sup>475</sup> These Kurus area assembled for battle (*samavetān kurūn iti*, *Bg* 1.25).

<sup>476</sup> That all of his kinsmen (*bandhūn*) are described as standing (*sthitān*) will be a powerful image in comparison to his decision to seat himself very shortly. The m. acc. pl. p. pass. participle of the verb *sthā* may imply the sense that his kinsmen have made their decision to fight. The reader may be led to understand that there is no dithering in the ranks on either side, except for one.

<sup>477</sup> Both armies are “standing near” enough to fight (*samupasthitam*, m. acc. p. pass. participle with prefixes *sam* + *upa* and the verb *sthā*), which is either in range of archers or possibly hand to hand combat *via* duels. The m. acc. adj. (*yuyutsuṃ* from the verb *yudh*) describes their intent. These two armies came to Kuru Field for a determined purpose (*Bg* 1.28). See also *Bg* 1.33 (*ta imevasthitā yuddhe*).

<sup>478</sup> The m. acc. pl. pr. participle *ghnato* from the verb *han* implies the ongoing intention of the men of both armies (possibly that some have already begun) to kill, but also, contrasts Arjuna’s lack of desire to kill them, and, in contrast to *Bg* 1.33 and the *kṣatriyas* who are willing to lose life and all earthly gain in death, he is willing to forgoe all sovereignty on earth by not fighting and killing.

<sup>479</sup> This is shocking to Arjuna, but it should not be for he brings all the same risks. By coming to Kuru Field they have already made the decision to let go of war booty and the very breath that give them life (*prāṇāṃs tyaktvā dhanāni ca*).

<sup>480</sup> *sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ; śūrā* (*Bg* 1.4), “heroes;” *anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā* (*Bg* 1.9), “and many other great heroes.”

<sup>481</sup> *maheśvāsā, mahārathaḥ* (*Bg* 1.4).

<sup>482</sup> *yuyudhāno bhīmārjunasamā yudhi* (*Bg* 1.4). The Kaurva hero *Yuyudhāno* is touted as equal to the Pāṇḍavā hero, *Bhīma*.

<sup>483</sup> *kāśirājaś ca vīryavān*. Kaurva King *Kāśi* is described as valorous (*Bg* 1.5). See also *Bg* 1.6 for the same, *uttamaujāś ca vīryavān*, “valorous Uttamaujās.”

<sup>484</sup> *narapuṅgavaḥ* (*Bg* 1.5). King *śaibyaś* is a “bull among men.

<sup>485</sup> *viśiṣṭā* (*Bg* 1.7). I.e., one who has a reputation as a conquerer.

<sup>486</sup> *nāyakā mama sainyasya* (*Bg* 1.7), “leaders” in Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s army.

<sup>487</sup> *samitiñjayah* [in battle] (*Bg* 1.8).

<sup>488</sup> *nānāśāstrapraharaṇāḥ* (*Bg* 1.9).

<sup>489</sup> *madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ* (*Bg* 1.9).

in numbers and power to defeat the Pāṇḍavas and protect their king.<sup>490</sup> Moreover, they are well-trained and tactically deployed.<sup>491</sup> On many occasions, they were prepared at any cost to defend their field marshal and greatest hero, Bhīṣma, who valiantly guards them all.<sup>492</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Posturing

“Posturing” is a universal phenomenon meant to strike a blow by way of intimidation in the hearts and minds of enemies. As a psychological weapon, the presence and power of drums and horns struck the first blow to the hearts of the enemy (*Bg* 1.19). Its strategic purpose is to impassion one’s warriors and break the resolve of one’s enemies. The *Mhba* records many instances of posturing. For example, Bhīma’s posturing caused Kurus to abandon the field and flee for their lives.<sup>493</sup> When the army commander sounds his horn, his men will follow suit. For instance, though Duryodhana was overconfident in victory, he roared like a lion.<sup>494</sup> He powerfully blew his conch horn, and on cue, the multitudes of horns, kettle drums, cymbals, and drums resound with a voracious roar.<sup>495</sup> As we may imagine, the sound of drums in a night battle would have been terrifying.<sup>496</sup>

Rather than cause confusion or fear in the ranks of the Pāṇḍavas, their heroes, led by Arjuna, responded with coordination and far more power than the former. The sonic burst ripped the courage from the hearts of the Kauravas, causing the heavens and earth to respond.<sup>497</sup> *Bg* 1.19

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<sup>490</sup> *paryāptam* (*Bg* 1.10).

<sup>491</sup> *ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgam avasthitāḥ* (*Bg* 1.11).

<sup>492</sup> *bhīṣmam evābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi*, (*Bg* 1.11). While the Pāṇḍavas are the object of the Kaurava war effort, Bhīṣma is the direct object of their protection. See *Bg* 1.10, *bhīṣmābhirakṣitam*, who appears to be the difference maker as the war commences.

<sup>493</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCI, 453

<sup>494</sup> *siṃhanādam vinadyocchaiḥ* (*Bg* 1.12).

<sup>495</sup> *śaṅkham, śaṅkhāś, paṇavānakagomukhāḥ, śabdāś* (*Bg* 1.12, 13). The sound was tumultuous (tumultuous).

<sup>496</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXX, 392.

<sup>497</sup> *hṛdayāni* (neuter accusative plural) could refer to the hearts of the heroes mentioned. More likely, it refers corporately to the Kaurava army as a whole. It is the direct object of the singular, causative, present and ongoing

describes this sound figuratively, in the sense of a present and ongoing slashing, bursting, rending, or tearing impact upon the hearts of the Kauravas.<sup>498</sup> This figurative language may be an early intentional contrast of the soon-coming ontology of the impenetrable, indwelling *dehī* in *Bg* 2.23-24. The soul, the *ātman*, cannot be slashed, burnt, or drowned (*Bg* 2.24). Their inability to stand their ground indifferent to their initial perceptions (*mātrāsparśās*) at the outset of the battle (*āgamāpāyininotyās*) may foreshadow their doom as a fighting force (*Bg* 2.14). At the least, it reinforces the irony that the vastly outnumbered army is the more powerful force. No doubt, the Kuru’s misplaced confidence in their strength of numbers (rather than Kṛṣṇa) stems from their *guṇa*-dominated stubborn prince, Duryodhana. The army that should not cower shook to its core.

#### 4.2.3 Perception and Combat Responses

Warriors experienced a range of emotions at Kurukṣetra. These emotions ebb and flow with the status of the battle.<sup>499</sup> Men often showed unmoving courage in action,<sup>500</sup> pride in their performance,<sup>501</sup> and cheerfully rushing into battle.<sup>502</sup> Many *kṣatriyas* experienced the ebb and flow of the *guṇas* as their resolve swayed like a pendulum. The text often portrayed the Kurus with strong emotional reactions. At one point, they became “hopeless” for Karna’s life.<sup>503</sup> Men who saw their king delimbed and decapitated became instantaneously filled with fear and retreated from

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action of *vyadārayat* (prefix *vi* + verb *dr*). The literary function of contrast (and comparison) permeates the *Bg*, e.g., both armies size up the other, the former conch horn depicted as lesser than the latter’s, Arjuna sitting while he should be standing. Arjuna’s despondency may be the personification of contrast of a warrior who for a moment cannot reconcile his duty to kill and the field whereby he must kill.

<sup>498</sup>*Bg* 1.13-18. The use of *tatas* implies a coordinated, simultaneous, ongoing, coporate action (*sahasā + abhyahanyanta*) following Bhīṣma (*shasāivābhyahanyanta*, v13). Note repetition of *tatas* in *Bg* 1.14 and the following scene. *Bg* 1.18 provides the end result of an orderly successive (*prthak prthak*) response (*dadhmuh*, active perfect plural of the verb *dhamā*) from the Pāṇḍavā heroes and others not mentioned (*sarvaśah*) to the two Kṛṣṇa’s conch-horns (active dual perfect *pradadhatuḥ* from prefix *pra* + verb *dhmā*, v14).

<sup>499</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CII, 208-209.

<sup>500</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLII, 341.

<sup>501</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXX, 419.

<sup>502</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428.

<sup>503</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVI, 410.



combat. However, the same men shortly recover, compose themselves, and reengage the fight filled with wrath.<sup>504</sup>

The epistemological functions of sight, vocalization, and hearing shifted men's bearing to extremes. At one time, an entire army became "stunned" and fell to the ground.<sup>505</sup> At another time, the twang of Bhīma's bowstring or the rattle of Satyaki's chariot took the fight out of men's hearts.<sup>506</sup> At times, hearing undeserved and unchivalrous insults was as devastating as physical weapons. Having been insulted, the great Sahadeva lost his love for his own life because of Karna's "wordy darts."<sup>507</sup> The sight of powerful weapons and great heroes fighting to the death powerfully impacted lesser men.<sup>508</sup> The scene of a duel between two great champions could be so terrifying that it inspired fear that witnesses were "deprived of their senses."<sup>509</sup> Or, the mere sight of Droṇa was so terrifying that Pāṇḍavas became pale and lost their bearing and nerve in battle.<sup>510</sup> The sounds of war impacted animal kind. For example, Ghaṭōtkaca's celebratory war cry over his slaying of Alayudha caused elephants to tremble.<sup>511</sup> Likewise, in another instance, the noble warhorses shed tears from the great attack on Droṇa.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 199; *Karna Parvan* 14.

<sup>505</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 416.

<sup>506</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVI, 270, CLXX, 392. Bhīma's arrows cause agitation amongst the ranks (*Droṇa - Jayadratha-Vadha Parvan*, CXXXVII, 294) and his leaping in the air, raging in joyous slaughter on one occasion caused the great Karna to hide on the floor of his chariot. See CXXXVIII, 298.

<sup>507</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXVI, 384.

<sup>508</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXX, 392.

<sup>509</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 410.

<sup>510</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 433.

<sup>511</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 414.

<sup>512</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIII, 450.

#### 4.2.4 Reckless Abandonment

A commitment to fight to the death was a common occurrence at Kurukṣetra.<sup>513</sup> At times, revenge determined a willingness to stay and fight.<sup>514</sup> Mutual accountability and etiquette were powerful motivators, and retreating before the enemy's face was condemned as a shameful, faithless, sinful, and spiritually detrimental act.<sup>515</sup>

There is ample evidence detailing how *kṣatriyas* “set their hearts” to the action of combat despite the environment and odds.<sup>516</sup> For example, in the *Droṇa Parvan*, Bhīma made a simple request to his brother, King Yudhiṣṭhira, to command him in the direction of whom he is to fight.<sup>517</sup> In another example, Dhrishtadyumna repeatedly expressed a determination to win or die as his duel approached, “I will slay him or he will slay me.”<sup>518</sup> Even the wicked Duryodhana displayed valor and conformity to his *dharma* when he encouraged Aśvatthāmā with a line reminiscent of *Bg* 2.38, “Defeat and death are the same. Rather, defeat is worse than death.”<sup>519</sup>

At times, the frenzy of the fight caused champions and lesser fighters to become reckless, disregarding their survival instinct.<sup>520</sup> Fighters associated Sātyaki with the two Kṛṣṇas (Arjuna & Kṛṣṇa) out of his willingness to dismiss bodily injury and death on behalf of his friends.<sup>521</sup> Bhīma remembered the wrongs inflicted upon his family by the Kurus, which caused him to fight with

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<sup>513</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIII, 377; (the desire for combat and ensuing deaths of men are likened a libation) *Karna Parvan*, 10, 11, 12, 13, “victory or death” for Kṣatriyas (*Karna Parvan* 16).

<sup>514</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 455.

<sup>515</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, C, 202.

<sup>516</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLI, 339; *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVI, 356, CLIX, 367.

<sup>517</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXV, 268.

<sup>518</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIX, 468.

<sup>519</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 473. See Sargeant, 123 for *Bg* 2.28. In this verse, Kṛṣṇa’s command, “unite yourself to combat” (*yuddhāya yujyasva*) is the manner why which he will not incur evil (*pāpam*), and it is the next step after he reorganizes the common combat phenomena of pleasure, pain, gain, loss, victory, and defeat. He is to make them *same*, thus, ultimately no more consequential than the other.

<sup>520</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX, 223, CXXII, 261, XCIV, 190, CXXIX, 277,

<sup>521</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX, 223.

reckless abandonment.<sup>522</sup> The *Mhba* describes Abhīmanyu as a “careless youth ... with an eye toward his duty.”<sup>523</sup> At times, recklessness in combat is detrimental to the mission, for losing one’s self-discipline can lead to defeat.<sup>524</sup>

#### 4.2.5 Joy of Battle

Despite the presence of fear, anger, and grief, the emotion of joy is noteworthy. The narrator commonly describes leaders and men as being “filled with joy.”<sup>525</sup> Kings engage their enemy with “joyous hearts.”<sup>526</sup> Incredible feats inspired joy in comrades to press the attack to their death.<sup>527</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira was “filled with joy” when he attacked Karna.<sup>528</sup> He cried tears of joy upon seeing his victorious army return.<sup>529</sup> The slaying of the Pāṇḍavas by Sakuni filled Duryodhana’s heart.<sup>530</sup> Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are “filled with joy” as they witness Satyaki’s warcraft.<sup>531</sup> Bhīma, “filled with joy” in the slaughter, wasted no time grabbing another mace to slay his foes joyously.<sup>532</sup> The slaying of a great enemy was a moment of joyous celebration through a lion-like roar.<sup>533</sup> The Kurus joyfully celebrated with instruments and lion-like shouts on account of the Pāṇḍus who were burning to death from the magical weapon called Aśvatthāmā.<sup>534</sup> In combat, the

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<sup>522</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXI, 282, CXXXVI, 292.

<sup>523</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLVI, 103

<sup>524</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 351

<sup>525</sup> The Pāṇḍu army experiences joy in witnessing Satyaki’s heroic feats. See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 249, CLIV, 346, CLXIII, 376, CLVII, 359; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 10, (both armies pictured as dancing in joy before the confrontation), 11, 12, 15, 16, 20

<sup>526</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVI, 409.

<sup>527</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLII, 95.

<sup>528</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXI, 255.

<sup>529</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVIII, 333.

<sup>530</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 353.

<sup>531</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVIX, 302.

<sup>532</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVII, 412.

<sup>533</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 418. See for the Kuru response of the slaying of Gatotkacha, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIII, 425.

<sup>534</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 479. Perhaps, a foreshadowing of the carnage, Kṛṣṇa mentions that the ātman cannot be burned (*Bg* 2.23).

joy of killing is acceptable because a *kṣatriya* expects to execute his duty as one “delighting” in battle.<sup>535</sup> For instance, Bhīma and Karna were “delighters in battle.”<sup>536</sup> The general expectation of a *kṣatriya* was to desire military action<sup>537</sup> and sanctioned duels.<sup>538</sup>

Often, joy followed a *kṣatriyas* resolve toward killing a specific champion.<sup>539</sup> For example, Yudhiṣṭhira speedily attacked Karna with a desire to kill him.<sup>540</sup> There is the mention of joy in a corporate sense. For example, the Kuru army delighted as they saw their hero lead them into battle.<sup>541</sup> Kṛṣṇa states in *Bg* 2.31-32 that there is no more excellent experience for a *kṣatriya* than a righteous battle. Therefore, we see Kṛṣṇa is also a “delighter in battle.”<sup>542</sup> Dying as a result of combat is a joyous occasion if the result is *mokṣa*.<sup>543</sup>

The positive responses, the euphoric declarations, and the exuberant gestations do not mask the gore of the war. In contrast, such descriptions enhance the grim task. For example, when Sātyaki delights in beheading Sudarsana,<sup>544</sup> the feeling of purpose, joy, happiness, and delight confirms his mission. Thus, it would be misguided to read the accounts of the war and dismiss them as antiquated romanticism. Quite the contrary, joy and carnage enhanced the pre-war, *kṣatriya* caste, and *dharma* dictated role. Amidst the battle, Duryodhana delighted in the *kṣatriyas* who approached him for permission to fight according to the custom.<sup>545</sup> But, leaders later

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<sup>535</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVIII, 334, CXCVI, 460, CC, 469, CCI, 480, *Ganguli, Karna Parvan*, 7.

<sup>536</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVIII, 438

<sup>537</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXX, 255, Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIII, 377, CLXV, 380, CLXX, 391, CLXXVI, 409, CXC, 441, CXCI, 445, CXCII, 448, CXCIV, 456, CCI, 478; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 1, 7

<sup>538</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLII, 342, CLV, 350, CLXIX, 388, CLXXI, 393, CLXXIII, 398, CLXXV, 405, CLXXVI, 409, CLXXXIV, 428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>539</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428; Ganguli, CLXXIII, 398, CLXXIV, 401, CLXXXVI, 434

<sup>540</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428; CLXXXIV, 428

<sup>541</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428; *Karna Parvan* 16. CLXXVI, 410.

<sup>542</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428; *Karna Parvan* 16. CXXI, 255.

<sup>543</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 10

<sup>544</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVII, 247, CLXXXIV, 428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16. Many of the following themes are found in *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>545</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVI, 409, CLXXXIV, 428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16.

questioned his leadership after retreating in the face of Satyaki. He was princely born and formidable and responsible for the Pāṇḍu anger.<sup>546</sup>

*Kṣatriyas* commonly adorned a smile as they contended in their craft.<sup>547</sup> In the *Droṇa Parvan*, Gatotkacha laughed a great, frightful lion-like roar and, with a smile, tossed Alumbusha's bloody, severed head upon Duryodhana's chariot.<sup>548</sup> Likewise, Sikandin smiled as his arrows pierced the body of his foes.<sup>549</sup> Bhīma, the most focused killer of the Pāṇḍus, smilingly leapt from chariot to chariot, bludgeoning his opponents with his hands in the act of rage.<sup>550</sup>

Delightful battle and joyous killing were not the ends; they were transient combat emotions as *kṣatriyas* fought for a greater reward than earthly, temporal riches.<sup>551</sup> For example, Bhīma and company desired a death appropriate to a *kṣatriya* “desiring heaven” as a reward.<sup>552</sup> Often, the account portrays *kṣatriyas* fighting with a purpose to achieve the end of rebirth, fighting in such a way that they may not return. Such a mentality implies victory or death for Yudhiṣṭhira's army,<sup>553</sup> and Kurukṣetra is *the* battle for such purposes.<sup>554</sup> Therefore, being killed in combat was always the best possible temporal goal for the individual *kṣatriya*.<sup>555</sup>

#### 4.2.6 Uncommon Valor

It was later said of a different breed of *kṣatriyas* long after Kurukṣetra, “uncommon valor was a common virtue.”<sup>556</sup> Bravery above and beyond duty permeated the masses of “heroic

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<sup>546</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXI, 255-256, CLXXXIV,428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>547</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVLI, 383, CLXXIII, 401, CLXXXIV,428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>548</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 402, CLXXIX, 414CLXXXIV,428; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>549</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXIII, 238, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>550</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLIV, 345, 346, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>551</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, *Karna Parvan* 16.CLXXXVI, 434, CLXXXIV,428.

<sup>552</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXII, 261, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>553</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXC, 443, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>554</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 430, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>555</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 474, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>556</sup> Pacific Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz described the U.S. Navy and Marine forces at the Battle of Iwo Jima.

combatants” and specific “heroic rivals.”<sup>557</sup> The presence of a great hero leading the army from the front is paramount to the strategy and tactics of both armies.<sup>558</sup> A fighter like Sātyaki could make an opposing army lose their ability to concentrate on their craft.<sup>559</sup> No more extraordinary example is the prowess and willingness of Arjuna’s son, Abhīmanyu. Facing insurmountable odds, Abhīmanyu led the vanguard of Yudhiṣṭhira’s attack against the prior unpenetrable defensive formation of the Kurus, and it cost him his life. Inversely, a hero that does not attack adversely impacts morale and causes fear to infiltrate the ranks.<sup>560</sup>

### 4.3 The Loss of Martial Bearing

At times, fighting in an area ceased out of respect and awe of two great heroes dueling, as is the case of both armies pausing out of curiosity to witness Droṇa and Yuyudhana,<sup>561</sup> the death and final breaths of Alamvusha,<sup>562</sup> and the safe distance from the Karna-Bhīma rampage.<sup>563</sup> But, on many occasions, heroes appear to break the code of warfare and encourage others to do likewise. One of the most scandalous scenes pertains to Kṛṣṇa’s role in promoting Arjuna to intervene on behalf of Satyaki, who was falling at the hands of Bhurisravas. *Kṣatriyas* are not to interfere in legitimate duels.<sup>564</sup> But, Kṛṣṇa did intervene. Having dismembered him with his arrows, Satyaki recovered without hesitation or remorse and beheaded him in fulfilling his destiny.<sup>565</sup> This scene

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<sup>557</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIII, 376, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>558</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIII, 376, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>559</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 328, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16.

<sup>560</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCI, 444, CLXXXIV,428; *Karna Parvan* 16. This is no doubt an element of Kṛṣṇa’s rebuke following Arjuna’s crisis.

<sup>561</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVII, 195

<sup>562</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CVIII, 220

<sup>563</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVII, 294

<sup>564</sup> The rules of engagement were agreed upon prior to hostilities, therefore, there is no allowance for deviation. See the beginning of the *Bhīsmā Parvan*.

<sup>565</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLII, 311

enraged the Kurus (before Kṛṣṇa explained his counsel) and their peers judged Arjuna and Sātyaki as less than noble.<sup>566</sup>

In another instance, *kṣatriyas* embraced their duty to fight and kill, like Ghaṭōtkaca's statement to spare neither the brave nor the timid.<sup>567</sup> One of the post-combat expressions connecting the *Mhbn* combat context to Arjuna's despondency is that other heroes regret their birth and *dharma* mission. For example, Arjuna is remorseful that he must fight and harm his great teachers, Kripa and Droṇa.<sup>568</sup> In one instance, he echoes the spirit of his pre-war *Bg* objection that he would prefer death to life.<sup>569</sup> In a different example involving Yudhiṣṭhira, Kṛṣṇa reprimands and reminds him that kings should fight kings rather than preceptors like Droṇa.<sup>570</sup> At another time, he disregards chivalry and, with insults, attacks the defenseless Bhīma seeking shelter.<sup>571</sup> Manu specifically prohibits shooting defenseless *kṣatriyas*, for example, "When he is engaged in battle, ... a man without armour, a naked man, a man without his weapons ..."<sup>572</sup>

Interestingly, the blood-thirsty Bhīma is overall portrayed as observant of the *kṣatriya* code, more so than any central divinely born Pāṇḍu hero.<sup>573</sup> Even the *Dharma* King, Yudhiṣṭhira, refers to a code of conduct after reflection upon Ahbīmanyu's wrongful death.<sup>574</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira questions the justice of *kṣatriya* duty that if they (the Pāṇḍus) are to punish the unrighteous by

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<sup>566</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLII, 308, CLV, 347. It was the loss of control on account of wrath that persuaded the Pāṇḍavas to eventually agree with Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Satyaki's method of slaying Bhurisravas, for, wrath can be the downfall of a man—even a great warrior, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLII, 311.

<sup>567</sup> "I shall slay all," see Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, CLXXIII, 400.

<sup>568</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 325-326

<sup>569</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCVII, 463

<sup>570</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXI, 373.

<sup>571</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLVI, 102, CXXXVIII, 299-300. See also Droṇa in *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCI, 445.

<sup>572</sup> Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 113.

<sup>573</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVIII, 298.

<sup>574</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, L, 8.

killing in combat, then Droṇa and Karna should have died first rather than the innumerable brave men under their command.<sup>575</sup>

The Pāṇḍus often despise Kripa; in one instance, he calls out Karna for his unjustified boasting.<sup>576</sup> Later, Karna mocks Sahadeva as unequal.<sup>577</sup> These negative examples portray combat-induced phenomena, and I infer they strongly buttress the implication that the interior affliction of *karmanighora* may be unavoidable, no matter how an individual faithfully commits to their warcraft (*dharma-yuddha*).

#### 4.3.1 Confusion and Loss of Martial Bearing

Like other battlefields, the din of battle was prevalent from the first to the entire 18-day war (*Bg* 1.12-13, 19).<sup>578</sup> Kings and their ranks listened for the twang of great bows from heroes like Arjuna and Ghaṭōtkaca, inspiring hope and terrifying the bravest hearts.<sup>579</sup> Confusion became common when heroes like Sātyaki roared like a lion before attacking Droṇa.<sup>580</sup> Men listened for the rap of the drums and the blowing of the conch horns, which emboldened reluctant and frightened *kṣatriyas*.<sup>581</sup> For example, the drums prepared the Kurus for the advance of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>582</sup> The celebration of a hero killed in action caused a sense of dread when *kṣatriyas* celebrated the death of a great enemy. On the one hand, it bolstered one's warriors, but on the other hand, it drove into the hearts of one's foes a profound realization of looming defeat.<sup>583</sup> The

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<sup>575</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIII, 426. He means the men in both armies.

<sup>576</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, 359.

<sup>577</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXVI, 384.

<sup>578</sup> The rattle of hundreds of thousands of chariot wheels mixed elephants and the struggle of several million men would have been overwhelming.

<sup>579</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXX, 392, CLXXV, 404.

<sup>580</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXII, 232.

<sup>581</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CIII, 209.

<sup>582</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CI, 206.

<sup>583</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVIII, 414.



psychological impact of beating drums is evident when the Pāṇḍavas celebrate the slaying of Droṇa's son, Aswathaman.<sup>584</sup>

Such scenes became highly confusing to the foot soldier. The *Mhbn* accounts repeatedly emphasize the element of confusion in battle—the “fog of war.” It was present as a response by an army to a superior assault.<sup>585</sup> On more than one occasion, men lost their military bearing and confusedly wandered the field and wailed their doom.<sup>586</sup> At times, the unsettled dust from thousands of chariots caused the banners that defined cadre and armies' delineations to become indistinguishable. As a result, they fought blindly and slew the man nearest to them.<sup>587</sup>

Therefore, fighting in an organized unit became a goal of individual survival rather than a military objective.<sup>588</sup> Men forgot their families and allies and killed each other in ignorance and utter disregard.<sup>589</sup> At one moment, in a night battle that became particularly ruthless, the Kurus threw down their torches and madly fought by moonlight as they listened for the directions of their leader's voices.<sup>590</sup> The neverending wails of countless men in the darkness were so distressing that King Yudhiṣṭhira sought out Kṛṣṇa's counsel.<sup>591</sup> The carnage of tens of thousands of beasts and millions of men caused individual warriors to invoke celestial weapons for psychological warfare, such as when Ghaṭōtkaca made himself appear as a giant by way of an allusion.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXV, 381.

<sup>585</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 184.

<sup>586</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIV, 240-241.

<sup>587</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 416, CLXXXVI, 433, CLXXXVII, 437.

<sup>588</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLII, 341.

<sup>589</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIX, 390.

<sup>590</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXII, 373, CLXIX, 390.

<sup>591</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 399.

<sup>592</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 403-404, CLXXV, 408.

### 4.3.2 Misconduct

There are multiple examples of complete breakdowns in combat etiquette. Sometimes, the environment affected the battle, as when the dust was so thick, men utterly disregarded all chivalry.<sup>593</sup> More common were acts motivated by vengeance, anger, and frustration. In one case, Ghaṭōtkaca became invisible using an illusion which Dhṛtarāṣṭra later criticized.<sup>594</sup> The integrity of Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Yudhiṣṭhira was called into question when Kṛṣṇa instructed Arjuna to lie to Droṇa, eventually causing Droṇa to drop his defenses, leading to his death.<sup>595</sup> Thapar notes Kṛṣṇa's counsel shocks both sides in a curious role reversal.<sup>596</sup> Arjuna objected,<sup>597</sup> but Bhīma reprimanded him for ignoring the big picture.<sup>598</sup> At another time, Dhṛtarāṣṭra accused the Pāṇḍavas of betrayal when they engaged themselves in an ambiguous "lie for the greater good" scenario, though the *Mhba* repeatedly emphasized that they were the morally superior family.<sup>599</sup> That Sañjaya agrees is strong evidence that the Kuru's accusations were grounded in truth. After all, Sañjaya is the example of a rightly perceiving individual and witness.

### 4.3.3 Rash Oaths

When the 'blood is up' and emotions are strong, *kṣatriyas* are prone to make promises they potentially could not fulfill. For example, the less prominent participant, Rukmaratha, prematurely boasted about his ability to capture the great Abhīmanyu. For this boast, he received the liberation of his head from his shoulders.<sup>600</sup> Later on, the death of Abhīmanyu powerfully affected the Pāṇḍu

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<sup>593</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVII, 197; *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXCIV, 454, CXCVI, 458, CXCVII, 462.

<sup>594</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 415.

<sup>595</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCI, 445,446, CXCII, 447

<sup>596</sup> Thapar, Romila, "War in the Mahabharata," *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (October 2009): 1830-1833. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/stable/25614409?seq=1#metadainfotabcontents>. (Accessed 8-28-2021).

<sup>597</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 456, CXCVII, 461, CXCVII, 462

<sup>598</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCVIII, 463, CXCVIII, 464-465. Yet another example of how mentally focused upon his co-mission.

<sup>599</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 456, CXCIV, 457, CXCVI, 458, CXCVII, 462.

<sup>600</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLIII, 96

army, even causing Kṛṣṇa to weep. Yet, it also became the cause for Arjuna’s rash oath to slay the wicked Jayadratha before the end of the following day. Realizing that Arjuna would fail, Kṛṣṇa saved his friend from what would have been a catastrophe, for if he had failed to keep his word, his oath would bind him to the dire fate of a disgraced *kṣatriya*.<sup>601</sup> Thus, the narrator deemed Arjuna’s oath as an ill-thought, extremely emotional response in the company of his peers rather than a strategic decision in the wisdom of Kṛṣṇa’s counsel.<sup>602</sup>

While Arjuna’s ill-thought-out vow took center stage, a broader view of Kurukṣetra reveals multiple examples of emotions predicating oaths when the rush of battle overtakes the *kṣatriya* (e.g., grief, rage, anger, revenge). For instance, Duryodhana taunted Arjuna to demonstrate his manhood (unaware of his imminent death and overconfident in his magically protective armor).<sup>603</sup> His taunt was directly related to his pre-war insults of the manliness of the Pāṇḍus the day before the war. It also directly corresponded to Kṛṣṇa’s chastisement in *Bg* 2.2-3. In a different scene, Dhrishtadyumna, upon seeing Droṇa vanquish his relatives, wagered the sum of the religious merit of his *kṣatriya* acts and Bhraman energy if he failed by day’s end to slay or was slain himself by Droṇa.<sup>604</sup> In another instance in the *Droṇa Parvan*, Sātyaki predicted Duryodhana would be filled with grief by his destructive exploits by the end of the day.<sup>605</sup> Finally, in the *Karna Parvan*, Bhurisravas boasted that he would make Sātyaki become conquered by “despondency” and give up his will to fight by the end of the day.<sup>606</sup> Assuming the role of leading the Kuru army, Karna viewed the Pāṇḍavas, specifically Arjuna, as already conquered.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXIII, 142.; *Abhīmanyu-badha Parvan*, LXXIX, 153. This is a similar fate of which Kṛṣṇa warn in *Bg* 2.2.

<sup>602</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXV, 145.

<sup>603</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CI, 206

<sup>604</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 434

<sup>605</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 249.

<sup>606</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLI, 305.

<sup>607</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 10, 11.

#### 4.3.4 Prolonged Exposure

The prolonged exposure to the fiercest combat experiences is a strong indicator of the authenticity of Vyāsa and the value of Sañjaya’s report. We see uncanny ancient attestations of experiences we call “battle stress” or “shell shock.” For example, prolonged exposure to combat caused men to become “senseless,” losing control of their ability to process the events of Kurukṣetra, coordination and an interior sense of direction, control over their emotions, and the ability to distinguish friend from foe.<sup>608</sup> Leaders and men often became “cheerless.”<sup>609</sup> For example, Yudhiṣṭhira is “cheerless” at the possibility of Arjuna falling in battle.<sup>610</sup> Susceptible to the shifting moods, Yudhiṣṭhira becomes “exceedingly cheerless” and sits on this chariot.<sup>611</sup> Such action should cause the reader to remember the interior domination of Arjuna, initially from *śokam*, then leading to *mohas* and then *viṣīdann*. In another instance in the *Droṇa Parvan*, Karna sighed in remorse and became “cheerless” when he viewed Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s dead sons at the hand of Bhīma.<sup>612</sup> In a different scene, Droṇa succumbed to “cheerlessness” and “extreme grief.”<sup>613</sup> Often, the *Mhba* portrays Kurus that fought with Droṇa losing all military discipline. A prime example is when they walked like dead men after Droṇa’s severed head was flung before their eyes.<sup>614</sup> The rampant infusion of cheerlessness in the ranks of an army is a common phenomenon of the impact of a great warrior.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCV, 191, CXIII, 239, CXIV, 242, 346, CLVIII, 366, CLXII, 373, CLXII, 374, CLXIII, 376, CLXXI, 395, CLXXII, 396, CLXXIII, 398, *Droṇa-vadha-Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 435, *Droṇa-vadha-Parvan*, CXC, 443, CXCIV, 455, CXCIV, 456, CXCIV, 460-461, CXCIV, 462, CC, 470, Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 3, 4, 7, 8.

<sup>609</sup> Bhīma’s perseverance in battle causes the Kurus to become cheerless, Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXV, 291.

<sup>610</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 221, CIX, 224.

<sup>611</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 355. See also re the death of Gatotkacha, CLXXXIII, 426. See also Karna’s reaction to the death of

<sup>612</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 291.

<sup>613</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCI, 445.

<sup>614</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIII, 453, CXCIV, 460-461, CCI, 480.

<sup>615</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVI, 246, CXXXV, 291, CLIV, 345, CLXII, 373 (Pāṇḍus), CLXXIX, 416,

### 4.3.5 Fear in Battle

Fear is a common emotion in the war accounts. While some heroes appear to resist fear in the face of innumerable odds, the sentiment is not a respecter of family or status.<sup>616</sup> For example, the noble Abhīmanyu single-handedly strikes fear into Duryodhana.<sup>617</sup> Both kings and their men are affected by fear on the battlefield.<sup>618</sup> The battlefield on one particular night is so terrifying that the narrator, Sañjaya, describes it as the “night of death.”<sup>619</sup>

The presence of fear is so significant that the two most common accounts were when an army fled in all directions for their survival or when a singular champion inspired fear in others. For example, the fighting men were filled with fear when they witnessed Jayadratha neutralizing the assault of the Pāṇḍu brothers.<sup>620</sup> Likewise, on one account, the Kuru army abandoned both their general (Droṇa) and king (Duryodhana) because they feared Arjuna.<sup>621</sup> So also, Sātyaki inspired the Kurus with fear.<sup>622</sup> Bhīma caused the Kurus to scamper like a spooked herd of deer.<sup>623</sup> Likewise, Droṇa caused the Pāṇḍu army to tremble like cows in the cold.<sup>624</sup> The epic describes the Kurus as shaking like the ocean's surging waves out of fear of Ghaṭōtkaca.<sup>625</sup> Leaders of both armies were concerned, e.g., when Duryodhana attempted to rally his men who feared Phalguṇa (Arjuna).<sup>626</sup> Likewise, fear motivated chariot drivers to escape with their lives as they bore the

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<sup>616</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIII, 248-249. For Karna, see Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 363.

<sup>617</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLIII, 97.

<sup>618</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVI, 271; CXXVII, 273. For Droṇa, see CI, 338. Kings are frightened at the road, CLXXV, 407, C, 205, CXXX, 278, CLX, 370, CXCI, 443.

<sup>619</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXIX, 389.

<sup>620</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XL, 93 (excluding Arjuna), CVIII, 219.

<sup>621</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIV, 322.

<sup>622</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVIX, 250;

<sup>623</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVI, 271; CXXVII, 272, CLXV, 382, CLXV, 383, CLXVII, 385, CLXVIII, 386. Karna is so terrifying that the Pāṇḍavas flee like a herd of doe caught by a lion—unaware of being delimbed by Karna's arrows, CLXXIII, 398.

<sup>624</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXIV, 265-266.

<sup>625</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 404. His roar causes elephants to “tremble,” CLXXIX, 414.

<sup>626</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 365; See *Karna Parvan* 16 for a description of Arjuna as a increaser of fear.

wounded Ghaṭōtkaca away from the battle.<sup>627</sup> Often, the death of a grand champion caused men to fear and to flee “in all directions.”<sup>628</sup> The frequent reaction of fighters fleeing “in all directions” signifies a complete panic and breakdown of military discipline and unit cohesion.<sup>629</sup>

In a fear-induced desperate act of misconduct, great warriors like Droṇa used magical weapons to manipulate the emotions of the battlefield.<sup>630</sup> Men who are confident and determined to fight and die at the commencement of battle often experience a change of heart and commitment due to the ferocity of the fighting, the impact of a champion, or magical weapons that cause a terrifying illusion.<sup>631</sup> Droṇa alone caused men to lose their standing and turn pale.<sup>632</sup> So also, Duryodhana feared for his army after Bhīma tossed before him the severed head of Alayudha.<sup>633</sup> Characteristic of their lesser prowess and the ease of their deaths at the hands of Bhīma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons feared for their lives.<sup>634</sup>

The greatest of champions are themselves susceptible to fear, although, on many occasions, they persevered despite their afflicted ranks.<sup>635</sup> At times, less prominent kings and their princes fled in the face of a duel.<sup>636</sup> On more than one occasion, fear of Droṇa caused Yudhiṣṭhira sleepless nights.<sup>637</sup> Out of love for his fighters, Yudhiṣṭhira feared the destruction of his army by Karna, whom he deeply resented.<sup>638</sup> Droṇa, who inspired the emotion, also feared sinking into a tactical

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<sup>627</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXV, 382.

<sup>628</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CVII, 217; *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXVII, 385, CLXVIII, 386

<sup>629</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXI, 395.

<sup>630</sup> The darkness turned the day to night and produced a thick gloom over the field, CLVI, 358.

<sup>631</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 350

<sup>632</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 433.

<sup>633</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVIII, 414.

<sup>634</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 416.

<sup>635</sup> For instance, Droṇa and Arjuna, Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 436. The roar of Aśvatthāmā inspired the Kurus who were afflicted by fear, CC, 469.

<sup>636</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLX, 370 (kings abandon their chariots), CLXXV, 405.

<sup>637</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXX, 279.

<sup>638</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 399.

quagmire on the battlefield.<sup>639</sup> Hence, great men, at times, sought protection. For example, Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that the *a-dharma*-natured Jayadratha surrounded himself with security out of fear for his life.<sup>640</sup>

Finally, related to the *guṇa* of fear, to retreat from the enemy despite the consequence of breaking the chivalric code is as common as advancing toward the enemy with the desire to kill and attain spiritual benefit. Armies repeatedly retreated when attacked,<sup>641</sup> and at times they were cut down as they fled despite the code that would forbid the slaying of a retreating enemy.<sup>642</sup> Well documented are the great champions who caused the retreat, both great and small: Satyaki,<sup>643</sup> Bhīma,<sup>644</sup> Arjuna,<sup>645</sup> Ghaṭōtkaca,<sup>646</sup> Droṇa,<sup>647</sup> and Karna.<sup>648</sup> Other factors caused armies to retreat, such as witnessing the great duel between Karna and Bhīma,<sup>649</sup> the traumatic sight of the beheading of great heroes like Jalasandha and Droṇa,<sup>650</sup> or the mere appearance of Droṇa on the battlefield.<sup>651</sup> Self-preservation and the overwhelming sense of dread became the most common catalyst for causing armies to scatter in all directions.<sup>652</sup> At times, men declared a total loss of hope for future victory.<sup>653</sup> Like Arjuna's crisis, fear is so powerful that men flee despite knowing the spiritually detrimental ramifications of retreating from a duel in an un-*kṣatriya*-like fashion.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> Droṇa references the "Dhristadyumna-mire," CI, 338.

<sup>640</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIV, 321.

<sup>641</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 181; *Karna Parvan* 13, 14, 22, 24, 26

<sup>642</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 435, (Karna slays while Pāṇḍavas retreat), CLXXIII, 398,

<sup>643</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXII, 232

<sup>644</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXV, 290, CLIV, 346, CLVI, 357, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXCIII, 453,

<sup>645</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 325.

<sup>646</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 350

<sup>647</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXII, 396, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CCI, 478

<sup>648</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 398

<sup>649</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVII, 294,

<sup>650</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIV, 242, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXCIII, 453,

<sup>651</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 399

<sup>652</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 349, CLVI, 358, CLVIII, 365, CLVIII, 367, CLX, 370, CLXII, 373, CLXXI, 395, CLXXIV, 401, CLXXV, 405, CLXXVII, 411, CLXXIX, 415, CLXXXI, 421, CCI, 478.

<sup>653</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 416.

<sup>654</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 325. See *Bg* 2.2.

#### 4.3.6 Anger

Anger, rage, or wrath was one of the most commonly cited responses to *karmanighora*. Consider the references to anger (*krodhas*) in the *Bg*. Kṛṣṇa addresses the emotion of *krodha* in *Bg* 2.62, 2.63; 3.37; 5.23, 26; 16.4, 12, 18, 21; 18.53. Anger is an important topic compared to other emotions from the *guṇas*. For example, Kṛṣṇa lists the characteristics of a sattvic determined divine rebirth in *Bg* 16.2: non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satyam*), absence of anger (*akrodhas*), renunciation (*tyagas*), peace (*santis*), non-slander (*apaisunam*), compassion (*daya*), freedom from desire (*aloluptvam*), kindness (*mardavam*), modesty (*hriṣ*), steadiness (*acapalam*). Similar is the mention of the emotion of hatred (*dvesa*, *Bg* 3.34; 5.3).

Wrath is a potent toxin that can cause a King like Duryodhana to chastise his greatest champion and general, Droṇa.<sup>655</sup> Or, in a different situation, Yudhiṣṭhira commanded Dhrishtadyumna to “rush in wrath” against Karna.<sup>656</sup> Wrath was present in Droṇa ’s motivation for revenge.<sup>657</sup> Having “brooded” in his heart over a quarrel, wrath changed the shape of Alayudha’s face as he sought revenge on Bhīma for his slain kin and the deflowering of Hidimva.<sup>658</sup>

Men became enraged in the heat of battle,<sup>659</sup> and kings and champions became excited and burned from within, powerfully influenced and fighting out of their emotions.<sup>660</sup> For example, see

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<sup>655</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXV, 430.

<sup>656</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428.

<sup>657</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 434.

<sup>658</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVI, 409; So also, Bhīma, who remembers wrongs caused by Karna, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXV, 289.

<sup>659</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, 359, CLXXII, 397. Vinda and Anuvinda attack Arjuna while being filled with rage, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 198. See also CXII, 233, CXXXVI, 291; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 12, 13, 14.

<sup>660</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, 359, CLVIII, 362, CLVIII, 363, CLVIII, 365, CLX, 370, CLXI, 371, CLXI, 372, CLXIII, 376, CLXIII, 376, CLXIV, 378, CLXIV, 379, CLXV, 380, CLXV, 381, CLXV, 382, CLXVII, 385, CLXVIII, 386, CLXVIII, 386, CLXVIII, 387, CLXIX, 388, CLXIX, 389, CLXX, 390, CLXX, 391, CLXXI, 393, CLXXI, 394, CLXXII, 396, CLXXII, 397, CLXXIII, 398, CLXXIV, 402, CLXXV, 405, CLXXV, 407, CLXXV, 408, CLXXVI,



Yudhishtira,<sup>661</sup> Satyaki,<sup>662</sup> Droṇa,<sup>663</sup> and Duryodhana (trembled with wrath).<sup>664</sup> See also Bhīma,<sup>665</sup> Ghaṭōtkaca,<sup>666</sup> Karna,<sup>667</sup> Yudhishtira,<sup>668</sup> Aswatthaman.<sup>669</sup> The great Alumvusha wrathfully struck Ghaṭōtkaca with his fist.<sup>670</sup> Droṇa,<sup>671</sup> Satyaki,<sup>672</sup> Bhīma,<sup>673</sup> Karna,<sup>674</sup> Somadatta,<sup>675</sup> and Ghaṭōtkaca became “mad with rage.”<sup>676</sup> In another instance, Bhīma and Karna resorted to hand-to-hand combat using whatever was available on the battlefield.<sup>677</sup> These emotions were also described visibly through the appearance of the eyes when they expanded before battle,<sup>678</sup> depicted as “eyes red with wrath.”<sup>679</sup> For example, see Duryodhana’s approaching Droṇa and Karna,<sup>680</sup> Bhīma,<sup>681</sup> Arjuna,<sup>682</sup> and Satyaki.<sup>683</sup> *Kṣatriya*’s had scorching and blazing

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409, CLXXVII, 412, CLXXVIII, 413, CLXXIX, 417, CLXXXI, 420, CLXXXIII, 425, CLXXXVI, 434, CLXXXVI, 435; *Droṇa-vadha-Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428, CLXXXVII, 437, CLXXXVIII, 438, CLXXXVIII, 438, CLXXXVIII, 439, CXC, 440, CXCI, 445, CXCII, 447, CXCII, 448, CXCIII, 449, CXCIII, 450, CXCIV, 455, CC, 469, CCI, 473-474, CCI, 475, CCI, 476, CCI, 477, CCI, 478; *Ganguli, Karna Parvan*, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 35, 37, 40, 42, 47, 50.

<sup>661</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CV, 215.

<sup>662</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVI, 245, CXCIX, 468 (body shakes with wrath), CXCIX, 468-469.

<sup>663</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXVI, 246, CLVI, 358, CXXIV, 263; Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 430.

<sup>664</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXII, 285; Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 366 (the wrath within is so intense that he loses his senses to the point that he is like an insect that cannot turn away from flying into the fire), CLXV, 382

<sup>665</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXII, 285; Bhīma responds wrathfully to Arjuna’s so-called rebuke of Yudhishtira, CXCIX, 463, CXCIX, 468-469.

<sup>666</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIII, 399, CLXXV, 408.

<sup>667</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVIII, 296, CXXXV, 289.

<sup>668</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVI, 357; grief and anger over the death of Ghaṭōtkaca, CLXXXIV, 428.

<sup>669</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 476, 477, CCI, 479.

<sup>670</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 402.

<sup>671</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CV, 215, CVI, 216, *Droṇa -Jayadratha-Vadha Parvan*, CXXIV, 265.

<sup>672</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX, 221, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXCIX, 468.

<sup>673</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVIII, 275, CXXXV, 289, CXXXV, 290, CXXXVIII, 297, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXC, 443.

<sup>674</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXII, 284, CXXXVIII, 297.

<sup>675</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVI, 356.

<sup>676</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 402, CLXXV, 405, CLXXIX, 415.

<sup>677</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVII, 412.

<sup>678</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 363, CLXIX, 388, CLXXXVIII, 438.

<sup>679</sup> See *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 353, CLV, 354, CLVI, 358, CLXV, 380, CLXV, 381, CLXIX, 390, CLXX, 391, CLXXI, 394, CLXXV, 403, CLXXV, 404, CLXXV, 406, CCI, 473, CCI, 477, CCI, 480; *Karna Parvan*, 15, 20.

<sup>680</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXI, 281.

<sup>681</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXI, 281, *Droṇa -vadha-Parvan*, CXCIX, 468-469.

<sup>682</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVIII, 300.

<sup>683</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIX, 468-469.

eyes (see the responses of Karna,<sup>684</sup> Bhīma,<sup>685</sup> and Vibhatsu).<sup>686</sup> The epic describes their physical appearance as “eyes red as copper.” For example, see Ghaṭōtkaca,<sup>687</sup> Duryodhana,<sup>688</sup> and Karna.<sup>689</sup> They were perceived to be as ferocious as “red-eyed dueling lions.”<sup>690</sup> Decapitated heads with eyes wide open and jaws still clenching their upper lip littered Kuru Field capturing the final moment of wrath.<sup>691</sup> Biting the upper or lower lip influenced by wrath/rage is noted, as well as other gestures like striking one’s hands against the other.<sup>692</sup> Aśvatthāmā slapped his palms to his side, bit his lip, and rolled his eyes in wrath.<sup>693</sup> Droṇa rolls his eyes in rage toward Satyaki.<sup>694</sup> Every champion on the field is (and often) impacted by the emotions of anger, consequently dominating their actions. See, for example, Arjuna.<sup>695</sup>

#### 4.3.7 Sorrowful Regret

Along with anger, the emotional response of grief and sorrow are the most common postcombat phenomena. I will only list a few examples. Everyone, even Kṛṣṇa, succumbed to the emotion of grief. For instance, Kṛṣṇa was “deeply afflicted” with grief as he tended to the emotional loss of his sisters, who were “pierced to the heart” over the death of Abhīmanyu. Nevertheless, Kṛṣṇa reassured them that the brave *kṣatriya* had indeed achieved *mokṣa*.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXI, 281, CXXXVIII, 296.

<sup>685</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXI, 281.

<sup>686</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIV, 314.

<sup>687</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 351, CLXXIII, 399.

<sup>688</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 365.

<sup>689</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 291.

<sup>690</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXV, 291.

<sup>691</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXI, 395.

<sup>692</sup> (Dhrishtadyumna) Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXX, 390, CLXX, 391, CLXXI, 395.

<sup>693</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLV, 354.

<sup>694</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CVI, 216.

<sup>695</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVII, 198, XCVIII, 199-200, CLXXXIII, 427.

<sup>696</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVIII, 152.

Fear incapacitates Yudhiṣṭhira causing him to be “choked with tears.”<sup>697</sup> In one instance, though grief is heavy upon his heart, he can still rise and return to the fight.<sup>698</sup> At one time, in the distress of battle, not being able to see and locate Arjuna or Sātyaki but hearing the twang of Gāṇḍīva, Yudhiṣṭhira became “filled” with anxiety, lost his peace of mind, considered defeat imminent, feared “the evil-opinion of the world” for allowing Sātyaki to die. He becomes “unmanned” and “overwhelmed” by grief. Lamenting what he perceives is the death of Arjuna and the consequences of Kṛṣṇa resorting to combat and the breaking of his oath, he is “bathed in tears,” deeply sorrowful, “sighing like a black cobra,” “stupefied by grief.”<sup>699</sup> In another scene, Kṛṣṇa intervenes on behalf of Yudhiṣṭhira, who is devastated by grief. The good king cannot see the entire battlefield; he has only one perspective. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa commands him, “Rise, O King, and fight. Bear the heavy burden.” He questions why there is grief in his heart. Kṛṣṇa states, “If cheerlessness over takes you our victory is uncertain.”<sup>700</sup>

One of the most powerful scenes was that of a grieving Arjuna over his fallen son.<sup>701</sup> Yet, even more incredible, Arjuna tearfully lamented with a severe sadness in his ‘heart’ that he had wounded his beloved preceptors, Kripa and Droṇa. It causes him to express disgust over his caste duties, saying this grief surpasses the death of his son, Abhīmanyu.<sup>702</sup> These few examples do not do justice to the enormity of the presence of pity, sorry, suffering, and regret at Kurukṣetra. In Ch. 5.2, I will expand upon Arjuna’s experience of sorrow in *Bg* 1.

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<sup>697</sup> Ganguli, *Dona Parvan*, CIX 222.

<sup>698</sup> Ganguli, *Dona Parvan*, CLXXXIII, 427

<sup>699</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXV, 266-268.

<sup>700</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIII, 425.

<sup>701</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXIX, 152, 153. Kṛṣṇa comes to Arjuna in a dream, LXXX, 155.

<sup>702</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 325-325.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have surveyed some of the common nonphysical combat traumas at Kurukṣetra. *Karmaṇīghora* wreaks havoc upon the men who fought the war and the wives that remained at home with the news that their husbands and sons would not return. The war books are a testament to the profound influence of the *guṇas*. Men are carried along with the ebb and flow like the changing tides of passion, anger, sorrow, or regret. This chapter is significant because it provides a snapshot of the horror of the battlefield. Those who never experienced combat may now imagine what Arjuna perceived would happen to those he had vowed to eradicate. The phenomena of the combat context provide the canvas behind Arjuna's struggles to fulfill Kṛṣṇa's commands in the *Bg*. Kurukṣetra is a paradox of *dharma* faithfulness and *a-dharma* reactions to the domination of the *guṇas* of war. No one escapes the negative impact of *karmaṇīghora*, not even Kṛṣṇa. Now that we may imagine the magnitude of the death and destruction, I will examine Arjuna's crisis more closely.

## Chapter 5

### Arjuna's Crisis that Disorders his Combat Readiness

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the key terms for understanding the complex nature of Arjuna's crisis. These terms are pregnant with meaning, conveying a sense of movement from order to disorder that brings the renowned hero to a humble position before his lord. The following terms are *viṣṭdann* ("despair"), *śoka* ("sorrowful regret"), *dr̥ṣṭvā* ("perception"), *tasmāt* ("reason"), *kaśmala* ("sinful timidity"), *klāibya* ("emasculate eunuch"), *mohas* ("confusion"), and *śādhi māṃ* ("correct/order me").<sup>703</sup> No one term acts independently. Instead, they exist in a dynamic relationship. For example, Arjuna was confused and discouraged because sorrowful regret had dominated his ability to rightly perceive the nature of combat and the reality of war. Consequently, the traumatic emotions impaired his ability to make decisions on the battlefield. Thus, Arjuna entered the field like a weak-hearted eunuch rather than a blazing "Yuga Fire."<sup>704</sup>

#### 5.1 Viṣṭdann: Despair

The third-party reporting from Sañjaya to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra identified Arjuna's crisis as "despair" (*Bg* 1.28; 2.1, *viṣṭdann*).<sup>705</sup> *Bg* 1.28 and 2.1 bracket Arjuna's crisis by way of an inclusio

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<sup>703</sup> I use the gerund, *dr̥ṣṭvā*, "having seen," to represent Arjuna's misperception. I use the adverb, *tasmāt*, "therefore," to represent Arjuna misreasoning.

<sup>704</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIII, 197.

<sup>705</sup> Present participle *viṣṭdann* of *vi* + *ṣad* occurs in *Bg* 1.28: 2.1, 10, an observation by Sañjaya of "ongoing despair." The root *ṣad* has a range of meanings: to sit upon, down, to sink down, to sink down into despondency or distress, to become faint, wearied, dejected, distressed, to despond, low spirited, pine and waste away. In the *Bhāṭikāvya*, it can mean "to sit down in an indecent posture," see Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1138. The sense of impropriety seems to be informative for *Bg* 1.28. Arjuna is embarrassing himself, his family, and Kṛṣṇa. Yet, Arjuna's decision may also be understood part of a pattern whereby sitting is a symbol for seeking help and restoration. When given the ability to magically see the war, blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra opted to only hear Sañjaya's report for he expected the accounts of the destruction of the *kṣatriya* caste to be too horrendous to perceive by sight. He is entirely dependent upon Sañjaya's reasoned perception.

directing the reader toward the content of the crisis.<sup>706</sup> This content is the immediate context that primarily informs the term *viṣīdann*.<sup>707</sup>

The experience of *viṣīdann* followed his *misperception* of the battlefield and led to the unnecessary reconsideration of his pre-war commitment. Preceding Arjuna's *viṣīdann* was his expression of "highest earthly compassion" toward the Kurus whom he "had just seen" (*samīkṣya*, *Bg* 1.27) across the field "staged for battle" (*Bg* 1.27, *avasthitān*). Tsoukalas reminds us that the act of seeing predicated the compassion that led to his despair.<sup>708</sup> However, while Arjuna actively looked across the field, his descent to *viṣīdann* was a passive process by the instrumental "working of profound pity" (*kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo*).<sup>709</sup> He wagered that an unarmed *a-dharma* death would produce more happiness than victorious lethal combat (*apratīkāram aśastram*, *Bg* 1.46). He would later question the joy that results from victorious, violent action (*Bg* 1.36, *naḥ kā prītis*).<sup>710</sup> According to the pre-war context, Arjuna entered the day resolved to fulfill his promise and purpose. However, with an abrupt change of course in v27-28, the *Bg* (*Mhba*) now depicts the opposite. Arjuna's resolve has dissolved, and he describes the Kurus as "my own people" (*svajanaṃ*) who are "approaching, ready and committed to battle" (*yuyutsuṃ samupasthitam*).<sup>711</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> The term 'inclusio' is a literary structure which brackets content with same or similar content in the following pattern—ABBA.

<sup>707</sup> Kṛṣṇa is well aware the reality of the age of which he is the Viṣṇu-*avatar*, yet he calls his companion to righteous combat that is no less a demonstration of what *would* have been possible in the age of *dharma* righteousness. The implication is that there is no time nor excused circumstance of which a warrior may refuse and violate his duty (*dharmakarman*). The fact that the present age is an age whereby ¼ of *dharma* is possible to fulfill is not an excuse. Kṛṣṇa expects his friend to fight as if it were the best of circumstances.

<sup>708</sup> See instrumental *parayā* of *para*, Tsoukalas, *The Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 60.

<sup>709</sup> *Kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo* is in the instrumental case. *Kṛpayā* with the root verb *√kr* may imply more than pity as a subject or object, but the basic nature of pity is work (*√kr*) that causes his ongoing despair. Pity works to cause despair in the interior life.

<sup>710</sup> What could be better than this, Kṛṣṇa retorts (*Bg* 2.31) from his explanation of the transcendent, indestructible nature of the *ātman* (*Bg* 2.28). Answer: Nothing for the warrior. Sañjaya contradicts his response by the end of the *Bg*. When we re-read the *Bg* for insight in the warrior-experience he intends the same conclusion prior to battle.

<sup>711</sup> Fowler makes no significant comment on *Bg* 1.28. See Fowler, Jeaneane, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.

Acknowledging the Kurus in such a way is a stark contrast to how the other half of his family (cousin Duryodhana's) hailed them the previous night.

## 5.2 *Śokam*: Sorrowful Regret

Upon reflection, Arjuna identified his primary obstacle as an internal state of “sorrowful regret” (*Bg* 1.47). By the conclusion of *Bg* 1, he is an internally disordered, combat ineffective *kṣatriya* seated upon his chariot amidst the intensifying conflict. Having cast down his great bow, Gāṇḍīva, he described himself as suffering from a “mind thrown backward by sorrow.”<sup>712</sup> Aurobindo comments that the image depicts Arjuna as “lapsed into an unheroic weakness” through a “recoil from the mental suffering.”<sup>713</sup> The mental image of a mind (heart) recoiling away from *dharma* is powerfully symbolic of the *kṣatriya*'s dilemma; it depicts the struggle between completing his pre-war commitment and the attachment to the nonphysical trauma accompanying violent, gory actions in combat. Other interpreters translate the present passive compound *sam + vij* as “possessing a heart fallen into sorrow” (Tsoukalas),<sup>714</sup> “a heart overcome by sorrow” (Sargeant),<sup>715</sup> “his mind distraught with grief” (Zaehner),<sup>716</sup> “overwhelmed by grief” (Sreekrishna/Ravikumar),<sup>717</sup> “overcome by grief” (Flood/Martin),<sup>718</sup> “his spirit overwhelmed by sorrow” (Radhakrishnan/Aurobindo/Easwaran),<sup>719</sup> “his mind tormented by sorrow” (Foss/Stoler Miller),<sup>720</sup> “mind disturbed by grief” (Yogananda),<sup>721</sup> “mind distressed with sorrow”

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<sup>712</sup> *saṅkhye, rathopastha, śokasaṃvignamānasas*, respectively.

<sup>713</sup> Aurobindo, *The Message of the Gita*, 24-25.

<sup>714</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 1, 96.

<sup>715</sup> Sargeant, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 85.

<sup>716</sup> Zaehner, R.C., *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 47

<sup>717</sup> Sreekrishna, Koti, Ravikumar, Hari, *The New Bhagavad-Gita*, 58.

<sup>718</sup> Flood and Martin, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 9.

<sup>719</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 106. See also Sri Aurobindo, *The Message of the Gita*, 22. See also Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 82.

<sup>720</sup> Foss, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 10. See also Miller, *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*, 29.

<sup>721</sup> Yogananda, *The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 64.

(Fowler/Ranganathananda),<sup>722</sup> “mind laden with grief” (Majundar),<sup>723</sup> “heartbroken with grief” (Harvey),<sup>724</sup> “mind overwhelmed with deep sorrow,” (Tirtha),<sup>725</sup> “spirit overcome with grief” (Deutsch),<sup>726</sup> “his whole being recoiling in grief” (Patton),<sup>727</sup> “overwhelmed with grief” (Prime/Prabhupada/Hill),<sup>728</sup> “heart smitten with grief” (Edgerton),<sup>729</sup> “heavy with sorrow” (Lal),<sup>730</sup> “heart immersed in grief” (Malinar),<sup>731</sup> “mind consumed with grief” (Sankaracarya),<sup>732</sup> “tormented by grief” (Thompson),<sup>733</sup> “distraught with grief” (Mohanraj),<sup>734</sup> “overwhelmed with anguish” (Gandhi),<sup>735</sup> “mind overwhelmed by sorrow” (Madhva),<sup>736</sup> “a sorrowful heart” (Dutt),<sup>737</sup> and “agitated by grief” (Feuerstein).<sup>738</sup> These options recognize a type of nonphysical trauma to the interior life of a *kṣatriya*’s mind, heart, whole being, or soul.

Kṛṣṇa describes a *kṣatriya*’s interior life in terms of an anxiety-free mind amid the misery of the moment, free of greedy desires amid pleasures (see also *Bg* 18.49). The ideal expectation for a state of mind is one of freedom from anger when a *kṣatriya* is tempted (explicitly) by passion (see also *Bg* 5.28) and the absence of a “fever” or a *dharma*-natured dilemma (see *Bg* 3.30). A

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<sup>722</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gītā: A Text and Commentary for Students*, 17. See also Swami Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gītā*, 83.

<sup>723</sup> Majundar, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 62.

<sup>724</sup> Harvey, *Bhagavadgītā*, 8.

<sup>725</sup> Tirtha, *Bhagavad Gītā for Modern Times*, 13.

<sup>726</sup> Deutsch, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 35.

<sup>727</sup> Patton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 15.

<sup>728</sup> Prime, *Bhagavad Gītā: Talks between the soul and God*, 10. See also Prabhupada, *Bhagavad Gītā as it is*, 61. See also Hill, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 82.

<sup>729</sup> Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 8.

<sup>730</sup> Lal, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 47.

<sup>731</sup> Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 61.

<sup>732</sup> Warrior, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 15.

<sup>733</sup> Thompson, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 7.

<sup>734</sup> Mojanraj, *The Warrior and the Charioteer*, 114.

<sup>735</sup> Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gītā According to Ghandi*, 47.

<sup>736</sup> Sonde, trans., *Bhagavad Gītā: Bhashya and Tatparyanirṇaya* (Vasantik Prakashan: Bombay, 1995).

<sup>737</sup> Dutt, *Mahābhārata*, vol., 4, 66.

<sup>738</sup> Feuerstein, *The Bhagavad- Gītā*, 91.



*Gīta*-prepared mind is free from fear (see *Bg* 6.14), sin, and evil (see *Bg* 6.28).<sup>739</sup> However, Arjuna’s mind is not indicative of these qualities. On the contrary, attachment to “sorrowful regret” dominates his mental capacities, disordering Arjuna’s combat-readiness.<sup>740</sup> He shows a lack of “heroic valor,”<sup>741</sup> but he accepts the *concept* of killing required by *dharma*. He is hiding *from* the interior traumatic consequences of his *dharma* to his cousins, not rejecting his defined caste purpose.<sup>742</sup> Despite declaring retribution before the war, the Pāṇḍu hero has turned full circle by the morning.

### 5.3 *Dr̥ṣṭvā*: Arjuna’s Misperception

As soon as a warrior becomes situationally aware, he/she calculates his next move. Having done so, he now looks upon his situation with enhanced perception. The quickness to act upon this process is a fundamental practice of awareness from training, and that moment is often the difference between life and death.

The gerund *dr̥ṣṭvā* (“after seeing,” from  $\sqrt{brū}$ ) communicates an active force preceding the circumstances of the main verb.<sup>743</sup> For example, in *Bg* 1.20, Arjuna spoke to Kṛṣṇa *after* seeing his opponents and raising his bow (also the gerund  $\sqrt{udyamya}$ ). His faculties of sight and hearing directly impacted his despondent episode. *Dr̥ṣṭvā* appears 12x in the *Bg*, and all occurrences

<sup>739</sup> *Duḥkheṣv anudvignamanās, sukheṣu vigataspr̥has, vītarāgabhayakrodhas, vigatajvara, vigatabhīs, vigatakalmaṣas*, respectively. Regarding *Bg* 5.28, 18.49, see Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā* (Bombay: Rao Bahadur, 1993), 131.

<sup>740</sup> For Kṛṣṇa’s “*guṇa* theory,” see *Bg* 18.19-49

<sup>741</sup> Aurobindo, *The Message of the Gīta*, 24-25.

<sup>742</sup> For “heroic valor” and “hiding in/from battle,” see *śauryaṃ; yuddhe cāpy apalāyanam*, both of which qualify the “intrinsic [guṇic] nature of kṣatriya combat (*kṣātram karma svabhāvajam*). *Yuddhe* may be translated as the standard locative (“in”) or a locative of reference (“from”), the latter implying the indicative nature of the battle of *karmaṇighora* as source. He hides in battle, from his *darma*, and from the nature of battle. All three options are warranted in the combat-context. Therefore, I translate as ‘in and from.’ See Whitney, 97.

<sup>743</sup> Whitney, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, 355. It inherently implies the logical structure of a sentence.  $\sqrt{udyamya}$  derives from *ud* +  $\sqrt{yam}$ . *Dr̥ṣṭvā* appears 12x in *Bg* (1.2, 1.20, 1.28, 2.59; 11.20, 11.23, 11.24, 11.25, 11.45, 11.49, 11.51, 11.52), most frequently in the context of the *rūpamaiśvaraṃ*.

precede *Bg* 12. Most occurrences are related to seeing Kṛṣṇa's *rūpamaiśvara* in *Bg* 11. To restore his perception, Kṛṣṇa must re-order how Arjuna views the battlefield.

### 5.3.1 Perception, Reason, and Kṛṣṇa's Word

Classical Hindu epistemology contains three ingredients: *pratyakṣa* (perception and experience), *anumāna* (reason), and *āgama* (written and verbal testimony). Dasgupta states that the *Bg* is not a "practical guide-book of moral efforts," nor a "philosophical treatise discussing the origin of immoral tendencies." However, the text challenges this view as early as *Bg* 2.3 ("stand up") and the discussion of the *guṇas* (*Bg* 3.5, 27-29). Monier-Williams defines *pratyakṣa* as what is present, visible, and perceptible "before one's eyes."<sup>744</sup> The semantic range covers "direct perception" and "apprehension of the senses."<sup>745</sup> A relevant variant to our combat context is *pratyjanana*, "immediate perception."<sup>746</sup>

Dasgupta writes that the *Bg* presupposes human frailty and attachment with a clear epistemological mandate to "show how one can lead a normal life of duties and responsibilities and yet be in peace and contentment in a state of equanimity and in communion with God."<sup>747</sup> I infer it presupposes the context of the war in the *Kali Yuga*. At the outset of Kurukṣetra, Arjuna is far from "peace and contentment," functioning as a *kṣatriya* in a "state of equanimity." Immediate perception is necessary for situational awareness. Having viewed the battlefield, Arjuna begins with a fundamental repositioning of himself from the ranks of obedient *kṣatriyas* led by his eldest brother, Yudhiṣṭhira. His initial word to Kṛṣṇa re-maneuvers his chariot to no tactical benefit, "O

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<sup>744</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2011), 674.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Dasgupta, Surendranath, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol II (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2010), 501-2.

Lord of the earth, *cause my chariot to stand* in the middle of the two armies” (*Bg* 1.21).<sup>748</sup> It is a precarious strategy. The initial “clash of weapons” has begun (*Bg* 1.20), and his bow (Gāṇḍīva) is at the ready, but no one calls Arjuna out for a duel (yet), nor is he leading the vanguard of an assault. His subordinates may have perceived the initial move toward the enemy lines as an engagement. They must have then perceived his actions as confusing, indecisive, and dangerous, contrary to *Manu* 7:194, which calls for the king (leader) to rouse and encourage his men, having arrayed them in battle formation.<sup>749</sup>

His perception affecting his reasoning leads Arjuna to a weak posture of “sinking down” before his kin, friends, and enemies.<sup>750</sup> The other participants expect him to stand and deliver victory, but he is slinking down out of view, inviting defeat. Therefore, we begin with the misperception (*a-pratyaksa*) leading to his flawed reasoning (*a-anumana*). While resisting one’s *dharma* responsibility and countering Kṛṣṇa’s initial correction was inherently rebellious, the context of their relationship remained one of close friendship, brotherly love, and loving worship.<sup>751</sup> Likewise, Kṛṣṇa’s word to re-order Arjuna’s immediate perception on the battlefield (Kurukṣetra) was an act of a benevolent Lord who recognized his friend’s struggles with the *guṇas*.

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<sup>748</sup> Tsoukalas comments that Arjuna is possibly repositioning in order to confirm his worst fears. However, the composition of the Kuru armies is well established prior to the day of battle. He knows of whom he must fight and kill, for he has sworn an oath to kill. Tsoukalas mentions *vyavasthitān* (v20) and *avasthitān* (v22), but I view the request (an imperative) to Kṛṣṇa as a strategic move “between the two armies,” implying neutrality, which in turn is identified by Kṛṣṇa to be scandalous. Furthermore, the etiological significance of *stha* implies more than a physical location. It is often a reference to *dharma* or the lack thereof.

<sup>749</sup> Olivelle, Patrick, *The Law Code of Manu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120. The term NCO is an acronym for Non-Commissioned Officer. All militaries have the concept in one form or another for organizational structure and efficiency of execution of orders.

<sup>750</sup> The term *viṣṭāntam* is most often translated with the sense of depression, despondency. However, I opt for a more visual translation in “sinking down,” a direction perpendicular to moving forward toward battle. Symbolically, his sinking down upon his chariot will be explained in detail as a physical expression of an inward confusion and resistance to his personal *dharma* (*svadharmā*), but, for now, it represents the opposite of Kṛṣṇa’s command to “stand up” (*uttiṣṭha*), from the prefix *ud* and *√sthā*.

<sup>751</sup> I understand perception and reasoning to be a dynamic and reciprocal process. Faith and understanding benefit each other. Greater understanding leads to greater faith. Greater faith leads to greater understanding. So also, perception and reasoning. The greater one truly perceives, the more rightly one may rightly reason, and *vice versa*.

The overall flow of the epic up to the *Bhīṣma Parvan* depicts Arjuna as ready, committed, and eager for combat because the conclusion of the peace attempts portrays a rightly reasoned dharmic response. But, under the surface is a swelling tide that will challenge Dharmakṣetra with the alternative, *a*-Dharmakṣetra.<sup>752</sup> Arjuna’s re-maneuvering becomes more puzzling when one compares his actions to his elder brother, who also surveys and responds in complete contrast to Arjuna.

### 5.3.2 The Perception of the Yudhiṣṭhira, The Dharma King

The first move on the battlefield was not a demonstration of power; it demonstrated obedience to *dharma*. The first scene portrays Yudhiṣṭhira’s initial decision to be characteristic of the well-earned title, “The Dharma King.” In the opening scene, Yudhiṣṭhira dismounted his chariot, secured his weapons, removed his armor, and boldly approached the Kuru line. Arjuna, his brothers, the Kauravas, and the Pāṇḍava army were surprised and questioned his behavior. Despite the ridicule, upon seeing his grandsire, mighty warriors, and teachers, the great Pāṇḍu king remembered proper etiquette. In response, the front lines allowed Yudhiṣṭhira to pass through the ranks and safely approach the famed Bhīṣma, whereby he sought permission, blessing, and victory for the war to come. In this scene, Yudhiṣṭhira rightly perceived the battlefield and acted upon the influence of truth-*guṇas* from his material nature.<sup>753</sup> So also, the Kaurava army allowed him to

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<sup>752</sup> *Bg* 1.1 has the locative *ksetre* (as opposed to the nominative *ksetra*). The combat-context implies the location of the war is “at the [physical] battlefield.”

<sup>753</sup> Although not infallible, Yudhiṣṭhira is both as a man and king *śraddhā* and *sāttvikā*, a man and king characterized by faith and the *guṇas* of truth (*Bg* 17.3, 4). His sacrifice is not one of food to the gods at an altar, but, of his kin and beloved men at the altar of war.

pass unharassed. They, too, see the appropriateness of the king's actions. Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and his brothers accompany him and witness the fantastic scene.<sup>754</sup>

A display of competent leadership from the invincible hero of heroes (accompanied and counseled by Kṛṣṇa) would undoubtedly have disseminated confidence throughout the Pāṇḍava forces.<sup>755</sup> However, there is a stark contrast between Arjuna and his oldest brother. Yudhiṣṭhira's actions appeared at first to be *a-dharma*, but the witnesses later rightly understood it for what it was, legitimate preparation for *dharmayuddha* ("legitimate righteous battle"). Arjuna's actions may have been anticipated first as *dharmayuddha*, for it could have appeared that he was moving forward to challenge Bhīṣma or Duryodhana to a duel. However, his response was soon rightly identified by all (especially Kṛṣṇa) to be sinfully timid, dangerously out of character, disgraceful (*Bg* 2.2), cowardly, contrary to the *dharma* of a *kṣatriya*, and a growing unwillingness and "impotence" regarding his passionate commitment to fulfill his promise (*Bg* 2.3).<sup>756</sup>

### 5.3.3 Endangerment from Mis-Reason and Mis-Perception

Arjuna's new placement in no man's land signals to all others that he is no longer a legitimate tactical target. For the unforeseeable future, he was committed to sitting out the war. Therefore, he and Kṛṣṇa were in immediate danger if the Kauravas chose to forego combat etiquette or were overcome by the lust to kill their most significant obstacle. However, despite seeing them defenseless, the Kurus followed the rules of engagement, implying they were *dharma* focused, acting in truth. They could not have heard a tender conversation over the tens of thousands

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<sup>754</sup> See Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLIII, 99-104. Yudhiṣṭhira receives his blessing and permission to seek victory from Bhīṣma.

<sup>755</sup> Sañjaya employs the imperative  $\sqrt{dr̥ṣṭvā}$  to *dhārtarāṣṭrā* to see how the sons of Pāṇḍu are deployed for war (*pāṇḍavānīkaṃ vyūḍhaṃ*).

<sup>756</sup> The term, *kṣudraṃ hr̥dayadaurbalyaṃ*, is a loaded phrase.

of animals and several million men from their position. However, many would have seen the events, the re-maneuvering, the shaking, especially Arjuna seating himself. Unlike Arjuna, the Kurus remain poised to fight.<sup>757</sup>

Strategically speaking, Arjuna isogetes his perception of reality on the battlefield. He foresees omens that indicate failure (*viparitani*, *Bg* 1.31) and not success (*na ca sreyaḥ*). Rather than interpreting the Kaurava warriors as hungry to fight and kill in battle, having seen them, Arjuna familiarizes them as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, grandsons, friends, in-laws, companions, and teachers (*Bg* 1.26-27, 34). It is a dangerous decision.

#### 5.3.4 Arjuna's Immediate Mis-Perception

Arjuna's *pratyjananas* began in *Bg* 1.22-31 after he saw his relatives in significant familial roles (v26-27), declaring them to be "my own people" (*svajanam*, *Bg* 1.28). Kinship and cultivating familial relationships were vital factors emboldening clan members,<sup>758</sup> but they were not unbreakable bonds under specific stresses.<sup>759</sup> Other heroes, like Sātyaki, regrettably embraced their duty to fight and kill their kin at the risk of their own life.<sup>760</sup> The text indicates that the Kaurava ranks do not see Arjuna as anything other than a strategic military objective that they

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<sup>757</sup> They were *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā*, see *Bg* 2.48.

<sup>758</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 454. Kinsmen place their sons and relatives on chariots to preserve them from destruction, while others remove and wash their armor knowing that death has come. See *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 460-461. Some warriors called out to their kin who joined them in battle, losing their senses in the pain and certainty of death, while others, remained calm and reserve, silent, others biting their lips in rage as they lay mortally wounded in their final moments on the battlefield. See Dutt, M.N., *Mahabharata*, vol 4, 133-134. See parallel in Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLVI. See also *Droṇa Parvan*, XXX, 73-78.

<sup>759</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXII, 396. The *kṣatriya* combat codes meant fathers killed sons, sons killed fathers. Bhīṣma is the grandsire of Arjuna. Dutt, M.N., *Mahabharata*, vol 4, 133-134. See parallel in Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLVI, 102, XLIV, 98. See also *Droṇa Parvan* XXX, 73-78.

<sup>760</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, DCXC, 442. Duryodhana reminisces upon times of friendship and happier days with Sātyaki, but, resolves himself to fight and kill if necessary.

must neutralize for any hope of victory.<sup>761</sup> Arjuna is unique in his immediate hesitation to “killing his kinsmen in battle” (*Bg* 1.31).<sup>762</sup> Arjuna’s brothers and Kṛṣṇa do not share his sentiments. For example, throughout the war, the “wolf-bellied” Bhīma is a single-minded, efficient killer who repeatedly reminds Arjuna that he does not share his compassion.<sup>763</sup> Bhīma does not vacillate between commitment and indecision, joy in purpose, and regret in duty.<sup>764</sup> *Guṇas* of passionate anger and rage may dominate him, but he is a counter-example to Arjuna concerning the purpose of the war and their call to arms. He continues the commitment shown by the Pāṇḍu host before the war.

In the final events of the days immediately preceding the war, Duryodhana repeatedly provoked the Pāṇḍu leadership so that they would lose their composure. The taunting was effective. They responded with red eyes, arms flailing, men springing up from their seats, ringing of hands, casting down ornaments, gnashing teeth, rage, and licking their mouths (reminiscent of Kṛṣṇa’s dissolution scene in *Bg* 11). Finally, the great hero, Vrikodhara, represented them all with his declaration and vow to destroy the wicked-souled fool (Duryodhana), “Come, fight with us!”<sup>765</sup>

Epistemologically speaking, Arjuna’s misperception of the enemy caused the psycho-emotional crisis in *Bg* 1.20-27, 29-31.<sup>766</sup> Preceding his crisis of “neverending pity,”<sup>767</sup> the sounds of several million men preparing and assembling for war would have been deafening. The

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<sup>761</sup> His enemies are already killing (*ghnatas*) by *Bg* 1.35, but he does not desire to fulfill his duty to kill them (*etan na hantum*).

<sup>762</sup> *hatvā svajanam āhave*.

<sup>763</sup> Arjuna. Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXVI, 271.

<sup>764</sup> A point that will be emphasized in the discussion over anumana, Arjuna demonstrates the same faulty reasoning first displayed in *Bg* 1-2, “this battle with kinsmen is distasteful to me,” Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, Section XCVII.

<sup>765</sup> Ganguli, *Udyoda Parvan*, CLXIII, 316.

<sup>766</sup> In *Bg* 1.20, the √*drś* in the gerund *dr̥ṣṭvā* (“having seen”) identifies the object of Arjuna’s preceding perception of the battle-ready enemy (*dhārtarāṣṭrān vyavasthitān*) and the subsequent raising of his bow (*udyamya*, also a gerund of the √*yam*) before the request to reposition his chariot (*Bg* 1.21).

<sup>767</sup> *kr̥paya parayavisto*, *Bg* 1:28. This is a result of “having seen” the Kauravas (gerund *dr̥ṣṭvā* from √*drś*)

Kauravas blast their horns, but they are outdone by the heaven-splitting resound of the Pāṇḍava conches.<sup>768</sup> Penetration of their conches hurt their hearts like arrows finding their mark (*Bg* 1.19). This scene will not be the last time the *Mhba* describes this type of audio-psycho-emotional experience.<sup>769</sup> This ritual repeats throughout the war with a devastating psychological impact on men,<sup>770</sup> the surrounding environment,<sup>771</sup> and the beasts of war (horse and elephant).<sup>772</sup> Animals of a lesser nature fell dead from the power of sound alone.<sup>773</sup> Similar in function, the drums, conch horns, and the bow twang, especially Arjuna’s, inspired hope and fear.<sup>774</sup> Some men found courage, some found resolve, and others met despair in the heat of the battle when heroes and lesser *kṣatriyas* produced “lion-like roars.”<sup>775</sup>

Arjuna expresses that he is *avistas*, and though we have examined his experience, he will not be the only *kṣatriya* to experience something similar to “pity-weakness.”<sup>776</sup> Like Arjuna’s incapacitation, many warriors and great heroes experience pity, sadness, and regret amidst combat. In one instance, Karna fled the battlefield after being overcome with emotional pain, having seen his brother decapitated.<sup>777</sup> Later, he wept with grief over the death of Dhārtarāṣṭrā’s sons, momentarily disengaging from combat, soon losing hope in his cause.<sup>778</sup> The tragic loss of

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<sup>768</sup> Contrast the “tremendous uproar” of the Kuru drums, cymbals, and conch horns (*Bg* 1.13) to the heart-splitting, heaven ringing sound blown by the great Pāṇḍu heroes (*Bg* 1.19).

<sup>769</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 48.

<sup>770</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVIII, 414; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 48.

<sup>771</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 48.

<sup>772</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 48.

<sup>773</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 48.

<sup>774</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 404; The sound of Bhīma’s bowstring is sufficient to dampen the nerve of his enemies, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 270.

<sup>775</sup> Ghaṭōtkaca’s roar causes elephants to urinate out of fear. Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXV, 405. Kings became terrified, CLXXV, 407. Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 22, 27,

<sup>776</sup> *kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvas*, *Bg* 2.7.

<sup>777</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLV, 100.

<sup>778</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIII, 236, CXXXII, 285, CXXXIII, 286-287, CXXXV, 289, CXLVI, 328.



Arjuna's son, Abhīmanyu, deeply grieved Yudhiṣṭhira even after Kṛṣṇa offered counsel and consolations.<sup>779</sup>

Arjuna described himself as restless and burning in grief on the night of his son's unrighteous killing.<sup>780</sup> However tragic it was, it did not match the tearful melancholy that he felt in his heart about wounding his beloved gurus, Kripa and Droṇa.<sup>781</sup> The Kuru king, Dhārtarāṣṭrā, also became overcome with grief upon seeing Arjuna enter the battle.<sup>782</sup> In a different example, the Kuru hero Bhurisravas boasted that he would make Sātyaki so incapacitated with despair that he would give up the fight before his duel.<sup>783</sup> Following a sound defeat from the triad of Arjuna, Bhīma, and Sātyaki, the *a-dharma* Kuru prince, Duryodhana, lost color (turned pale), became melancholy, filled with grief, and promptly retreated to Droṇa's tent (*guru*), deeply afflicted, confessing his cowardice and guilt.<sup>784</sup>

Even the great Yudhiṣṭhira was not impervious to the pull of overwhelming grief in the wake of a lost brother in arms. Having seen Ghaṭōtkaca slain by Karna (sacrificed by Kṛṣṇa for the greater good of defeating the invincible Karna), the righteous king became stupefied. He then sat upon his chariot, streaming tears, sighing deeply, extremely cheerless, and afflicted by grief.<sup>785</sup> His actions at that moment resembled Arjuna's decision to sit upon his chariot.

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<sup>779</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXI, 136. This is a similar example of Kṛṣṇa responding to Yudhiṣṭhira's temporary crisis.

<sup>780</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVII, 148, LXXIX, 152, 153.

<sup>781</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 325-326. His grief carried over to the morning.

<sup>782</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVIX, 301.

<sup>783</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLI, 305.

<sup>784</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIX, 335-336. Droṇa is consequently filled with grief, CI, 337.

<sup>785</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXX, 418, CLXXXIII, 425, CLXXXIII, 427, CLXXXIII, 427, CLXXXIV, 428. Yudhiṣṭhira fears the ignominy of public opinion, "bathed in tears," "sighing like a black cobra," "stupefied by grief." See also *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX 222, CXXV, 266-268.

### 5.3.5 Arjuna loses Strength and Composure

The *Bg* describes Arjuna's experience in ways that the *Mhba* describes nonphysical combat trauma. One of those characteristics was a loss of strength and composure—Arjuna's posture shifts from standing tall in his chariot to a disordered and ineffective commoner. Gāṇḍīva falls because he is no longer physically able to carry his primary weapon (*Bg* 1.30), not unlike the post-combat experience of the Kauravas when they witnessed the slaying of their beloved protector, Droṇa.<sup>786</sup> When Arjuna sank to his chariot seat, he foreshadowed many warriors who would lose their strength, disappear from the field, or become physically exhausted due to prolonged exposure to fierce combat. As a result, both men and beasts became battle weary. Exhaustion caused warriors on both sides to abandon their weapons and drop into extreme fatigue.<sup>787</sup> *Kṣatriyas* suffered a loss of vision, and, in one instance, they killed one another while in a dream-like state.<sup>788</sup> On one occasion, Arjuna suggested they cease fighting and sleep on the battlefield. In the morning, adequately rested, they arose and continued to fight where they had paused.<sup>789</sup> On a different occasion, their energy spent, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa supernaturally rejuvenated their steeds who were pierced and weary from battle.<sup>790</sup>

Arjuna shared other phenomena. In his episode, Arjuna's body underwent involuntary, physical trembling (*vepathuś*) while hairs raised on end.<sup>791</sup> So also, his limbs sank, his mouth instantly became parched, Gāṇḍīva fell to the ground, his skin burned, and his thoughts and mind rambled uncontrollably (*Bg* 1.29-30).<sup>792</sup> With a mental state that actively wandered from a lack of

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<sup>786</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 3.

<sup>787</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428.

<sup>788</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXIV, 428-149.

<sup>789</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVI, 358, CLXXXIV, 429.

<sup>790</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVIV, 200.

<sup>791</sup> These are passive experiences from powerful outside influences.

<sup>792</sup> I picture a mind "running away" from Arjuna's particular *dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre*.

focus, determination, and purpose, he captured his physical, mental, and emotional state with the admission, “I do not have the energy to remain standing” (*Bg* 1.30).<sup>793</sup> Influenced by its combat context, I interpret it as, “I cannot maintain a state of battle readiness to lead and fight.” Arjuna was combat ineffective, for his mind could no longer remain singularly focused on his pre-war commitment. More importantly, his attention focused away from Kṛṣṇa toward the future consequences of his actions. In and of itself, the latter is a risky diversion, for, in the *Bg*, Kṛṣṇa prioritizes a singular focus upon himself as the object of devotion in battle.

Arjuna’s loss of combat readiness and effectiveness was also common in the *Mhba*. For example, having seen a hero fall, an army can lose its ability to execute the war efficiently.<sup>794</sup> The unexpected death of a great hero is a shock to an army.<sup>795</sup> The disordered state was individually<sup>796</sup> and corporately<sup>797</sup> present in an emotional rush of an attack,<sup>798</sup> often experienced by kings, generals, and minor leaders.<sup>799</sup> It occurred through prolonged participation in and exposure to combat, often combined with hunger and thirst.<sup>800</sup> The *Mhba* frequently describes Duryodhana with the same characteristics, who was so motivated by wrath and revenge that he once lost his senses.<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> *na śaknomy avasthātum*. Note the combination of *ava* and the verb *sthā*. The concept of individual energy of the warrior is common in the *Mhba*. Each warrior has energy, or power, which varies from hero to rank and file warrior.

<sup>794</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXIII, 239.

<sup>795</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 182.

<sup>796</sup> Sātyaki was momentarily “deprived of his senses” after absorbing arrows from Duryodhana. See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCV, 191.

<sup>797</sup> Bhīma causes kings and armies to flee in every direction deprived of their senses. See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLIV, 346; CLXII, 374, CLXIII, 376, CLXXII, 396, CLXXIII, 398, CXC, 443; CLXXXVIII, 439, CXCIV, 456, CXCVII, 460-461. Yudhiṣṭhira perceives his army “deprived of their senses.” See CC, 470. On the death of Droṇa, men “became pale and deprived of their sense,” Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 3.

<sup>798</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXII, 375.

<sup>799</sup> *Droṇa-vadha-Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 433-434. Droṇa’s son, Aswatthaman, perceives Durhodhana (and his retreat after Droṇa’s death) “not to be in his usual mind.” See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXC, 443. Arjuna describes the defeated Droṇa as “almost deprived of his senses.” See CXCIV, 462. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the ladies of his court become “deprived of their senses” upon hearing of Karna’s death, Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 4, 7.

<sup>800</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 435.

<sup>801</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 366. See also, *Karna Parvan*, 25.

In the wake of Droṇa’s slaughter, Pāṇḍavas abandoned their weapons, ignored their respectful relationships, and fled as men “deprived of their senses.”<sup>802</sup> In addition, Elephants trembled, an example of how the *Mhba* associates the same nonphysical traumas across the board.<sup>803</sup> Even the narrator, Sañjaya, was questioned regarding his mental state because of the battlefield conditions.<sup>804</sup> Droṇa causes the Pāṇḍu army to tremble like cows shivering in the cold.<sup>805</sup> Seriously wounded, Bhīma trembles in his chariot.<sup>806</sup> Wrath causes Kṛṣṇa to be “deprived of his senses.”<sup>807</sup> However, in contrast, some great warriors (e.g., Karna) did not lose their senses in battle.<sup>808</sup> They remained focused, not trembling, not sinking into grief.<sup>809</sup>

### 5.3.6 Arjuna’s Hair Stands on End

Another experience that Arjuna shares with combatants in and after a battle is the sensation of one’s hair bristling, or, as more commonly described, the hair on the head and body “stands on end” (*Bg* 1.29).<sup>810</sup> This phenomenon was associated with the anticipation of combat,<sup>811</sup> pre-combat posturing with conch horns,<sup>812</sup> in response to fighting or dueling,<sup>813</sup> upon hearing a report of the battle,<sup>814</sup> upon the cheering of a great warrior’s prowess,<sup>815</sup> third-party witnessing of a great

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<sup>802</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXII, 396.

<sup>803</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 414.

<sup>804</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXII, 374.

<sup>805</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXIV, 265-266.

<sup>806</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVI, 357.

<sup>807</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 34.

<sup>808</sup> The text mentions this fact 3x in the immediate context. See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIX, 417.

<sup>809</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVIII, 363.

<sup>810</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, Section CV.

<sup>811</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXI, 158-159; Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 46

<sup>812</sup> *Bg* 2.19. Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXIII, 170.

<sup>813</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCVI, 192, XLIV, 98, CVII, 218; CXXV, 266, CXXX, 278, CLXXV, 403. The hand to hand combat between Ghaṭōtkaca and Alumvusha made their hair stand on end, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 402; See also Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 1, 19

<sup>814</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX, 221

<sup>815</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 293, CLXXI, 394. Droṇa’s son, Aswatthaman, rouses his father’s troops causing their hair to stand on end, which, in response, Yudhiṣṭhira admits that the shouts cause men’s hair to stand on end, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIV, 461.

duel,<sup>816</sup> a psychological response to the roaring animal witnesses and participants,<sup>817</sup> extreme combat conditions (i.e., fighting at night),<sup>818</sup> and the reaction of fully recognizing Kṛṣṇa in battle.<sup>819</sup>

#### 5.4 *Tasmāt*: Arjuna’s (Mis)reasoning

The dis-ordering *guṇic* pull that rendered Arjuna's combat ineffective immediately impacted his capacity to reason. The reason is the “mode by which” Arjuna “comes to a final conclusion” regarding his participation in the battle.<sup>820</sup> Monier-Williams defines *anumana* as “inferring, drawing a conclusion, consideration, reflection.”<sup>821</sup> There are two blocks in the *Bg* where Arjuna provided a counter-apologetic against his *dharma* required pre-war commitment (*Bg* 1.32-47; 2.4-8). Compared to the war's accounts, one does not consistently find examples of Arjuna’s perception in other *kṣatriyas* except where men succumb to trauma in and after combat.

##### 5.4.1 Arjuna’s First Argument (*Bg* 1.45-47)

*Bg* 1.45-47 represents Arjuna’s reasoned conclusion based on his arguments in v32-44, which flow from his perception in v20-31. Whereas the crisis was Arjuna’s alone, he reasons on behalf of the entire Pāṇḍu force.<sup>822</sup> For example, in *Bg* 1.32, Arjuna states he has no wish to gain victory, kingship, and joy at the expense of the lives of his relatives (*Bg* 1.34, *sambandhinas*), for

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<sup>816</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIV, 315; Hairs stand on end resembling a porcupine, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXV, 381. See also Ganguli *Karna Parvan*, 16.

<sup>817</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLIII, 344, LXXVII, 149.

<sup>818</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 349

<sup>819</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCII, 485

<sup>820</sup> Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ*, 48.

<sup>821</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 37.

<sup>822</sup> See *Bg* 1.32 (*na kankse vijayam*), 35 (*etan na hantum iccchami*) and the transition to the plural in v37 (*tasman narha vayam hantum*), with the emphatic pronoun *vayam*.

he has no desire to kill them despite that they are in a killing frame of mind (*Bg* 1.35, *ghnatos*). He buttresses this argument by addressing the absence of the joy or pleasure that should result after “killing these aggressors” (*Bg* 1.36, *hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ*). Speaking for himself as representing the king and army, he concludes that the Pāṇḍus are not justified in killing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (*Bg* 1.37). There is a repetition of the concept of joy or happiness that should be present, but they would be (he assumed) absent on a monumentally catastrophic family level (*kuladharmā*).<sup>823</sup> He infers that others are not rightly perceiving and discerning the repercussions of the war, like his army, who were (he concludes) seeking power and riches because they are not “seeing” their own “overpowering thoughts of greed” (*Bg* 1.38).<sup>824</sup> They are not recognizing the evil (*doṣam*) of a war that would destroy their extended family and the criminality (*patakam*) of acting with “treachery against a friend” (*mitradrohe*). They, the righteous Pāṇḍus, should have known to “turn back by way of seeing” the bigger picture and, thus, prevent the war (*Bg* 1.39).<sup>825</sup> He substantiates his case in v40-44 with the repetition of evil (*doṣam*, 1.38-39) and the broad-reaching ramifications of destroying the family relationships between the Pāṇḍus and Kurus. Arjuna made a real-time battlefield judgment.<sup>826</sup> Arjuna further based this conviction on what he presumes to be his authority (“truth is my weapon,” see 8.5.8). He assumed that he alone rightly reasons the bigger picture, for he pauses between the two armies.

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<sup>823</sup> See *Bg* 1.32, 33, 36, 37.

<sup>824</sup> *na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah*. The use of the 3p pl. of the verb *√paś* implies Arjuna again speaking as if he alone sees rightly on behalf of the Kauravas. The passive participle *upahata* from the prefix *upa* and the verb *han* implies that a *kṣatriya*’s thoughts, his attention, his focus is succumbing to the powerful influences of the *guṇas* that come hand in hand with the spoils of war. The thoughts (*cetasas*) of greed (*lobha*) will not be the fundamental emotional expression in the war to come. Rather, anger (*krudha*) will take center stage. However, the Kauravas are repeatedly characterized as greedy and evil, culpable for the war. In this situation, Arjuna reasons rightly.

<sup>825</sup> *pāpād asmān nivartitum kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ prapaśyadbhir*. It is the instrumental use of the prefix *pra* and verb *√paś* that Arjuna reasons should be the means of this specific evil. It is not that destruction of the family is wrong at all times, for, death and loss is the result of all wars. Arjuna specifies “this evil” (*pāpād asmān*) and destruction (Kuru Field).

<sup>826</sup> Arjuna spoke this “in the battle” (masc loc sing of *samkhye*).

Returning to his crisis, he concluded that he would prefer the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra to kill him while he was unarmed. In Arjuna's thinking, such a non-*kṣatriya* death would be an obvious benefit to fighting victoriously for himself, the men of the Pāṇḍava army, and by implication, fulfilling his commitment to his brother (*Bg* 1.46).<sup>827</sup> Re-reading v46 in the broader combat context gives insight into Arjuna's reasoning. The clause *kṣemataram*, is commonly translated as "greater happiness,"<sup>828</sup> "better for me,"<sup>829</sup> "more for my welfare,"<sup>830</sup> "more welcome and beneficial,"<sup>831</sup> and "far happier."<sup>832</sup> Tsoukalas opts for "greater happiness." However, his lexicon allows for, a "more comfortable state," and his commentary suggests "a more peaceable course" and a "safer way."<sup>833</sup> Though he chose "greater happiness" in his translation, his comments also support the latter three, or even mine ("easier"). Therefore, I prefer to translate the clause *tan me kṣemataram bhavet* as, "that would be a great ease to me." When understood in the context of v47, the sense of Arjuna's first conclusion is that dying a shameful death at the hands of his enemies would be a much easier *dharma* than fighting and killing them and fulfilling his pre-war commitment. Therefore, the clause ("sinking down on his chariot seat") is not only symbolic of his resistance according to his perception and reasoning; it hints at the trauma from the expectation of *karmanighora*. It is simply easier to sit out the war and avoid duty. But also, when interpreted

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<sup>827</sup> In a subtle shift from the 1p pl(we) back to the 1p sing. genitive (me), Arjuna refers to himself in comparing future victory (*dharma*) to the alternative of a disgraceful death (*me kṣemataram*). His use of the optative act *bhavet* (*bhū*) implies that he is calling out this superlative to Kṛṣṇa, but not Kṛṣṇa alone, but to all warriors at Kuru Field. It may be that he is meaning, "Look and do like me." This is not improbable for Kṛṣṇa later uses himself and how he acts but does not act as an example for Arjuna (and others) to follow as they complete Kṛṣṇa's work.

<sup>828</sup> Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 84. Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 95, Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 47

<sup>829</sup> Prabhupada, *The Bhagavad Gītā As It Is*, 60; Warrior, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 15; Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, 105; Ranganathananda, *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, 83; Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 16, Mahundar, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 61

<sup>830</sup> Aurobindo, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 21.

<sup>831</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 164.

<sup>832</sup> Ghandi, 9.

<sup>833</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol.1, 95-96.

literally as “sinking down,” it may be a subtle indication that he was lowering his profile because he knows the shame associated with his action (see Kṛṣṇa’s response in *Bg* 2.2-3).<sup>834</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Arjuna’s Second Argument (*Bg* 2.4-8)

Arjuna’s second round of arguments (*Bg* 2.4-8) begins with a personal question, “How can I kill my [grandfather] Bhīṣma and my [*guru*] Droṇa in battle?” Arjuna partly based his objection on his love for them, knowing that even an argument between family members is prohibited.<sup>835</sup> Yet, he argued with Kṛṣṇa, stating it would be easier to eat like a beggar (the second dismissal of his caste duty, see *Bg* 1.46) than to reap the spoils of war—that any temporal benefit from victory would be tainted “by blood” (*Bg* 2.5).<sup>836</sup> Then, speaking (in the indicative mood) for his king and army,<sup>837</sup> he transferred his *svadharma* confusion (*Bg* 2.5) to the corporate level declaring that the entire Pāṇḍavā host was confused about the proper outcome of the war (*Bg* 2.6). Then, returning to himself, he requests the assistance of Kṛṣṇa, mentioning that he is emotionally and psychologically “defeated” by “pity-weakness” and that his mental state is “confused as to his duty.” The repetition of the comparatives *sreyas* (*Bg* 2.5, 7) and *gariyas* (*Bg* 2.6) reinforce the magnitude of his crisis as he compares the consequences and, perhaps, plays out different final scenarios of the battle in his mind. Arjuna ends his reasons with a final appeal—two imperatives

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<sup>834</sup> Kṛṣṇa refers to both respectively in the *Bg*. Moreover, the action of killing is a mental decision that affects both one’s mind and seat of emotions. Modern American warriors have been taught/trained to not only win the battle, but the “hearts and minds” of the people affected by violent, terrible action. The p. pass participle prefix *sam* and *vij* conveys a symbolic direction of Arjuna’s reasoning. He has decided to proceed from that moment in opposite direction of his *dharma*. Gāṇḍīva is pictured no longer passively falling from his hands (*sramsate*, 3s pr. indic middle of *srams*) because of the initial overwhelming experience, but, now the object of Arjuna actively casting it down to the ground (*visṛjya*, gerund prefix *vi* and the verb *ṣṛj*). The subtle shift may also imply that Arjuna picked up Gāṇḍīva from the floor of his chariot, but, at the least, he re-established his grip on his weapon. Perhaps, this happened more than once as Arjuna dithered, initially raised at the commencement of battle (*Bg* 1.20), slipping from a firm grip (*Bg* 1.30), now decidedly caste down as a symbolic rejection of his *dharma* (*Bg* 1.47).

<sup>835</sup> See Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 78.

<sup>836</sup> For example, the phrase “blood money.”

<sup>837</sup> Remember, Arjuna has *prapasyadbhis* contra the Pāṇḍus/Kurus.



to Kṛṣṇa to “tell” and “correct” or “order” him as his disciple (*sisyas*).<sup>838</sup> While he confessed with confidence that he could not “see” what “could [possibly] displace” his “sorrowful regret” (*śokam*), he requested that Kṛṣṇa teach him the knowledge necessary to weigh the costs of war and to order him according to his duty as a *kṣatriya*. Thus, Arjuna is fallen before Kṛṣṇa’s feet in a posture of devotion (*Bg 2.7*).

The divine instruction of Kṛṣṇa comes through focused oral *agama*. Part of the sense of *agama* is the “acquisition of knowledge.”<sup>839</sup> Another sense of *agama* is “science.”<sup>840</sup> Arjuna requests that Kṛṣṇa tell him (*bruhi*) what he should know regarding his *dharma* (*Bg 2.7*); therefore, it is plausible to view the dialogue as a ‘Kṛṣṇa science of combat.’ In that light, the request, *śādhi māṃ*, is to “correct” his bearing, to re-order his lost art of war previously disclosed by Yudhiṣṭhira at the outset of the forest exile. In the scene from the *Adi Parvan*, it is Yudhiṣṭhira who is considering avenues by which he may avoid war with his cousins. In other words, Yudhiṣṭhira is disordered to his *dharma* role until a wandering aesthetic approaches him and instructs him on his proper mission. Once Yudhiṣṭhira is ‘re-ordered,’ he shares Arjuna’s role in how events will unfold. The connection between the two scenes is that we have a disordered hero who is re-ordered by embracing verbal teaching to refocus both of them back to their proper *dharma* purpose.

Arjuna seeks “certainty” (*niscitam*) in his time of emotional weakness and mental confusion, clear teaching that will leave him without doubts about his *kṣatriya* duty (*Bg 2.7*). There are repeated appeals to Arjuna to train his mind and to carry out his warcraft in a manner that specifies killing his enemy. However, the *kṣatriya* path requires him to focus on his duty and

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<sup>838</sup> I opt for using “re-order me” for *śādhi māṃ* in place of “correct me,” although the latter is inerrant to the former. Arjuna’s strong request for Kṛṣṇa to “correct” him will be a re-ordering of his ability to perceive and reason in combat. It is a correction to his disordered, combat ineffective state. As Kṛṣṇa will explain, Arjuna’s great evil was comparing his caste duty to others, and then concluding that it would be more preferable to complete the some other.

<sup>839</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 129.

<sup>840</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictictionary*, 129.

purpose (*Bg* 2.30) rather than his opponents and their relationships with him (*Bg* 1.27).<sup>841</sup> Arjuna’s chief objection is (clearly) the killing of his cousins. For example, death and killing permeates this section of the *Bg*: *hatva*, *Bg* 1:31; *tyaktva*, *Bg* 1:33; *hantum*, *ghnatas*, *Bg* 1:35; *nihatya*, *hatva*, *Bg* 1:36; *hantum*, *hatva*, *Bg* 1:37; *kulaksayakrtam*, *Bg* 1:38, 39; *kulaksaye pranasyanti*, *Bg* 1:40; *kulaghnanam*, *Bg* 1:42, 43; *hantum svajanam udyatas*, *Bg* 1:45; *rane hanyus me*, *Bg* 1:46; implied in *Bg* 2:4; *ahatva*, *hatva*, *Bg* 2:5; *hatva*, *Bg* 2:6). However, it is not because he questions whether or not the Pāṇḍus are justified in punishing their usurping cousins. They are. What one does not find from Kṛṣṇa is a treatise on the ethical or moral implications of the war. The *dharmakṣetra* at *kurukṣetra* is *jus bellum*.

### 5.5 *Kaśmalam* when *Klaibyaṃ*: A Sinful, Timid Masquerade

Kṛṣṇa’s perspective is always the rightfully discerned perception. In *Bg* 2, Arjuna is *kaśmala* (*Bg* 2.2) when he acts like a *klaibya* (*Bg* 2.3). Both are the direct result of having been “burdened with compassion” (*kṛpayāviṣṭam*). He expresses his assessment of the battlefield as “eyes” which have been “filled with tears and disorder” (*aśrupūrṇākulekṣaṇam*). He categorizes the loss of ‘vision’ as an ongoing dysfunctional state of *viṣḍantam* (*Bg* 2.1, see 8.3).<sup>842</sup> Kṛṣṇa then responds to Arjuna’s argument (*Bg* 1.21-47). There is a sense of abruptness to his tone.

On the one hand, by way of a summative rebuke, it cuts through Arjuna’s misguided, self-righteous objection. On the other hand, it is an insight that prepares the reader for Arjuna’s retort

<sup>841</sup> Note the comparison of *sam + iks* in 1.27 and *av + iks* in *Bg* 2.30.

<sup>842</sup> The adverb *tathā* expresses a cause and effect. Arjuna’s crisis causes Kṛṣṇa to respond (*Bg* 2.2-3). Tsoukalas translates the BV compound as “... filled with tears and confusion,” however, I prefer “... filled with tears and disorder.” While it is not as natural a translation, “disorder” communicates the same sense of confusion as to the duty of fighting his kin, but it ties *Bg* 2.1 with the theme of Arjuna’s desire of *śādhi* in *Bg* 2.7. Arjuna admits a disorder of his interior life but, is humble enough to still desire Kṛṣṇa to “re-order” him. See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 102.

in *Bg* 2.4-8 and the content of *Bg* 2.10 through *Bg* 18. The scene implies an erroneous but potent dose of “compassion” for those who do not warrant pity. The sense of a burdening and disordering impact flows naturally with the symbolic action of Arjuna sitting down in his chariot (*Bg* 1.47). Before delving into Kṛṣṇa’s response, I note that he “laughs” (*prahasann*, *Bg* 2.10). The gesture is a curious reaction given Arjuna’s protestation and posture significance. I suggest a hint of humor in his mocking of the distraught hero (*Bg* 2.2-3). Kṛṣṇa identified Arjuna as a *klaibya* and pointed out the absurdity of continuing to play the part of a man dressed as a member of a harem.

### 5.5.1 *Kaśmala*

The term *kaśmala*, commonly translated as “trepidation,” also carries the quality of a degrading impurity because of a sinful timidity.<sup>843</sup> Griffiths translates the term as “lifeless dejection.”<sup>844</sup> Tsoukalas opts for the more strict sense of the word (“filth”) to convey the “social/cosmic” unrighteous quality of Arjuna’s refusal to be in harmony with his eternal duty and the “eternal flow of things, the way of the universe,” captured in the term *ṛta*. In addition, he reminds us of how the *Bg* introduces Kṛṣṇa as *śrībhagavān* with *śrī* bringing the sense of the illumination that comes from Kṛṣṇa. The use of *śrībhagavān* may be an intentional reference to *Bg* 10.11, whereby Kṛṣṇa discloses his “illuminating knowledge” as the indwelling *ātman* which overcomes the darkness of those warriors who properly remain in “constant combat-readiness” (*Bg* 10.10).<sup>845</sup> Another lexical option is “dejection of mind.” It makes sense if his mental discipline is failing due to “sorrowful regret.”

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<sup>843</sup> Tsoukas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1., 104-105.

<sup>844</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 10.

<sup>845</sup> I argue the phrase “constant combat-readiness” from context and that it is no less in line with spirit of the gen. plural BV compound, *satatayuktānām*. I take it to refer to the properly ordered, mentally disciplined, discriminating perception that combat is the warrior’s act of worship. I read it as a genitive of reference, thus, to what does a proper state of constant discipline refer? Nothing other than combat-readiness. It is not just “constant,” but a proper (true) state of readiness (*sat-*).

### 5.5.2 *Klāibya*

In *Bg* 1.28, the combination of *tathā* and *kṛpayāviṣṭam* conveys the instrumental causative power of Arjuna, overwhelmed by his emotional attachment to seeing his enemies as kin that he must not kill.<sup>846</sup> *Kṛpa*, with the root  $\sqrt{kr}$ , relates to the emotional attachment working in Arjuna in opposition to the ultimate work of Kṛṣṇa (*lokakṣayakṛt*, *Bg* 11.32).<sup>847</sup> He is processing the information at Kurukṣetra, but the result is a disorder rather than readiness. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa warns him about playing the part of a *klāibyam*—a man whose interior is not what his exterior presents (*Bg* 2.4).<sup>848</sup> Rather than the caste role of a *kṣatriya*, Arjuna was in the process of fulfilling a much lesser character in Kṛṣṇa’s purposes. Hence, kṛṣṇa’s command, “Stand up” (*uttiṣṭh*, *Bg* 2.3), calls Arjuna to return to the *dharma* script. The brink of war is no time to recast. He is becoming a *klāibya* because he is embracing the ill-timed attachment to the passing feelings associated with combat; Arjuna will delay Kṛṣṇa’s purposes if he does not assume the certainty of the combat traumas to come. Essential to his *dharma*-sanctioned action, he fights as one “having disregarded unfitting, impotent heart-sickness.”<sup>849</sup> I opt to translate *tyaktā* in the sense of “disregard” because it implies a more apparent contrast to Arjuna’s crisis of perceiving and then the interior struggle with the *guṇas*. Yogananda highlights the “spiritually” dangerous impact when he draws from the *Mhba* by inferring from his epithet, “Son of Pārtha.” His mother, Pritha, was later named Kunti,

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<sup>846</sup> Tsoukas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 60, 102. The instrumental case is used in both instances of *kṛpa* in *Bg* 1.28 and 2.1.

<sup>847</sup> As Time (*kālosmi*), Kṛṣṇa reveals himself in *Bg* 11 as the causative agent of the mighty destruction of the world (*lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho*). Arjuna is to embrace this work as his mission.

<sup>848</sup> Contra Sargeant who only provides the interpretive option of “cowardness.” Sargeant may be thinking in unison with others, but the idea of cowardness is less germane to the combat-context. See, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 88. Note the missing scene with Uttara in Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 107 and others. This is an example where the interpretation is spot on, and while Monier-Williams references the semantic range of options, the previous scene becomes fruitful and illuminating. See *klīb*, *klība*, *klībāya*, *klīv*, *klīva* which appears in the *Mhba* respectively with attention to the *Bhīṣma Parvan*, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 324.

<sup>849</sup> *kṣudram hṛdayadaurbalyam tyaktvottiṣṭha*.

who faithfully displayed discrimination when accepting her father’s decision to be adopted by his cousin, Kuntibhoja. Thus, Yogananda teaches that in this reference to being the son of the excellent female role model, Kunti, one learns that “the devotee’s power to invoke divinity gained through dispassion or renunciative will.”<sup>850</sup> Ironically, the verse ridiculing Arjuna’s unmanly, emasculated behavior is the same verse that Kṛṣṇa uses to remind Arjuna to imitate his mother’s faithfulness in accepting a fate that must have torn all that she knew at that time to be true.

The issue is not courage or cowardness, for Arjuna is far from a coward. Before the war, Arjuna voluntarily takes on a vow and poses as a eunuch in King Virata’s service against the sharp ridicule of his immediate family. Though he has the power to conquer all worlds, he restrains himself out of respect for his brother’s vow and his sense of his unique co-mission with Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna’s decision to conceal his identity is a shrewdly calculated, daring move. Yet, the scene changes when Kṛṣṇa mocks him by asserting that he is still playing dress-up to fool his audience. At Dharmakṣetra, there is no more need to masquerade. Kurukṣetra is the proving ground of a *kṣatriya*’s skill to remain in a constant state of combat readiness. It is universally known as a field of sacrifice. It is as if Arjuna is hiding behind a false identity of his choosing, much like he hid in plain sight in King Virata’s harem.

I translate the first half of *Bg* 2.3, “You really should never become a *klaibyaṃ*.”<sup>851</sup> Tsoukalas’s translation is pertinent, “Surely you should not go towards cowardice.”<sup>852</sup> Reading the direct object against *śokasaṃvignamānasasṇ* (*Bg* 1.47) fits well with my emphasis on the combat context because Arjuna has a heart “recoiled back” after maneuvering to no man’s land in his

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<sup>850</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 176. For a synopsis of Pṛthā/Kunti, see Mani, Vettam, *Purāṇic Encyclopedia*, 442-443.

<sup>851</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 106. I take the sense of “truly” from *sma* in my option of “really.”

<sup>852</sup> Tsoukalas, , *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 107.

attempt to sit out the war.<sup>853</sup> Arjuna must advance, but now Kṛṣṇa warns him not to retreat in the wrong direction. He is symbolically moving away from the unique co-mission he enthusiastically embraced before the war as Kṛṣṇa’s “agent of wrath.”<sup>854</sup> This crisis is not consistent with Arjuna’s vast combat history, veteran status, and universal fame because it is *akīrtikaram*, powerful causation of disgrace and infamy.

For this reason, I prefer to keep *klaibyaṃ* untranslated. While the option of “cowardness” strengthens the sense of Arjuna’s passionate and psychological response, the choice of “unmasculine man” indicates an inability to perceive the war and remain committed to his pre-war context. Griffiths picks up this sense when he renders *klaibyaṃ* as a “degrading weakness,” thus contrasting the nature of an Aryan in v2, “strong men know not despair.”<sup>855</sup>

Perhaps, a better option would be the combination, “unmanly like a *klaibyaṃ*.” The choice is not unwarranted, for a *klaibyaṃ* has a broader meaning than “coward.” See also, Tsoukalas, Zaehner, “Play not the eunuch,” van Buitenen, “Do not act like a eunuch,” Radhakrishnan, “Yield not to this unmanliness,” Edgerton, “Do not play the eunuch,” Deutsch, “Yield not to this impotence.”<sup>856</sup> Fowler observes this scene as more “man to man” than “God to man.”<sup>857</sup> Fowler makes the point that the dialogue is *kṣatriya* to *kṣatriya*. Still, she would agree that the nature of the “man to man” conversation is always simultaneously friend to friend and Lord to the devotee. In this respect, acting like a *klaibyaṃ* will prevent his proper worship (*bhaktiyoga*) because his

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<sup>853</sup> *rathopastha upāviśat*, Bg 1.47.

<sup>854</sup> I borrow the phrase, “agent of wrath,” from *Romans* 13.3-4, but also, Kṛṣṇa’s command to “be” or “become” his “mere instrument” for the purpose of sleighing the Kurus (Bg 11.33).

<sup>855</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 10-11.

<sup>856</sup> Cited from Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 107. See Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 9. See Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1., 176, “. . . surrender not to unmanliness.” Yogananda posits the “surrender” to the illusion of temporal enjoyments as opposed the discipline of discrimination whereby one may “attract the divine experience of living in the joy of God resplendent in every atom of space?” He describes the former devotee as one who “loves the bodily prison” as to one who seeks “Spirit” (God), 173-174.

<sup>857</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 29.

*dharma*-dictated, caste-required worship *is* combat (*karmayoga*). I cite two additional examples from the pre-war context that help understand what it meant for Arjuna to act as a *klāibyaṃ*.

### 5.5.3 Example A: “... only eunuchs answer in words”

Directing Kṛṣṇa to reposition his chariot between armies so that he may search and destroy his foes with arrows from Gāṇḍīva is part of their history.<sup>858</sup> On the eve of battle, having heard Duryodhana’s repeated insults of Kṛṣṇa and himself, Arjuna consoles the messenger Ulaka who delivered the insulting message. Having reminded his passionate brother, Bhīma, that the blame lies on Duryodhana, he says in modern parlance, “Do not kill the messenger.” But, consistent with the mood of the room, Arjuna does promise to kill Duryodhana. Ganguli translates Arjuna’s response to Ulaka, “When tomorrow comes, stationed at the head of my division, I shall give the answer to these words through Gāṇḍīva. For they who are eunuchs answer in words.” Arjuna swears to avenge Yudhishtira, Kṛṣṇa, and himself through combat.<sup>859</sup> Yet, when that day comes, *he* is the one who speaks like a eunuch. He gives words rather than war. Therefore, based on this scene, a *klaibya* has no place on a battlefield, for a *klaibya* belongs in a king’s harem. When Arjuna gives words, he communicates the sense that he is a harmless impotent servant of someone else. He is not sexually potent, which symbolizes a lack of lethality. He belongs with the king’s concubines, which suggests he has identified himself as not belonging to the ranks of battle-hardened *kṣatriyas*. Something powerful has dominated Arjuna, but it is no cowardness. The second scene below further illuminates the wavering hero.

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<sup>858</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LIII, 90.

<sup>859</sup> Ganguli, *Udyoda Parvan*, CLXIII, 317. While not mentioned in this scene, always assume Draupadi is included in their intention for retribution.

#### 5.5.4 Example B: Arjuna Restores a Young Prince

The second episode is a critical pretext for interpreting Arjuna's delusion. Unfortunately, it appears to be little noted by most commentators. In a scene from the *Virata Parvan*, we see a role reversal where Arjuna is the righteous *kṣatriya* admonishing and encouraging a wavering warrior to press onward to the battle. The interchange with Uttara, the son of Virata, characterizes how one would expect Arjuna to act in the forthcoming war.

Knowing that his father had led men into battle ahead of him while he was left alone to defend the city, Prince Uttara approached the enemy Kaurava lines. Yet, he lost his courage in the face of great men like Duryodhana, Bhīṣma, and Droṇa. It should not go unnoticed how brave his actions are when alone, out of a sense of duty, he approached a vast host of grim-faced killers. But Uttara's maneuvering is not what it seems to be to the opposing forces. Like Arjuna of the *Bg*, having seen the Kauravas, he also misperceives the battlefield. The young *kṣatriya*'s reasoning left him disordered, railing in the wind. Having confessed to this failure, he admitted that his hair stood on end, his mind was disturbed by thoughts, and losing consciousness from fear.<sup>860</sup> As a result, Uttara became disoriented and despaired, and the color of his face faded before the sounds of battle, the shining armor, and the glint of cold iron. Yet, Uttara is fortunate, for he unknowingly is in the company of Arjuna. Disguised as his driver with the name Vrihannala, Arjuna begins to comfort the neophyte warrior who was naturally less masculine in appearance and not physically intimidating.<sup>861</sup> Arjuna warns Uttara that returning without his kin's rescue (having before boasted

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<sup>860</sup> I am summarizing from Ganguli's English translation.

<sup>861</sup> Ganguli, *Virata Parvan*, XXXVIII-XLVI.



of his manhood) would bring his peers' embarrassment, dishonor, and chastisement for not completing his *dharma*.

For he is a prince, and a prince must play his part. Yet, even then, Uttara rejected his purpose, conceded defeat, and accepted his inevitable destruction. Like Arjuna, Uttara threw down his bow and turned tale to flee the upcoming engagement. Arjuna then follows in hot pursuit, exclaiming that such behavior is not the way of a brave *kṣatriya*. However, something is off about the unfolding scene. As Uttara's episode unfolded before them, the Kauravas deduced the charioteer to be Arjuna incognito. The Kauravas erupt with laughter at the sight of a charioteer disguising himself as a eunuch with his costume dropping piece by piece to the ground. Finally, Arjuna grabs the prince by the train of his hair and drags him back to the chariot half-out of his mind. Unrelenting, Prince Uttara attempted to buy off his chariot driver for his release, but Arjuna reminded him that he was born a *kṣatriya* and, if necessary, he would swap roles he Uttara may drive. Uttara's dharmic understanding of the situation begins to change as he slowly regains the status of a prince. Uttara only learns the identity of his chariot driver (Arjuna) after Arjuna makes him retrieve his brother's powerful weapons from the *sami* tree. With restored courage and commitment, the rejuvenated prince declared his readiness to drive Arjuna into battle at the word of his command. If necessary, into the very heart of the Kaurava defenses. Boasting from what I infer to be an authentic commitment to his *dharma* role, Arjuna promises that he alone will fight them and recover Uttara's kin.

Yet, at the blowing of his conch, Arjuna stands, but Uttara sits. Uttara allows his audio perception of the powerful sonic weapons to dominate his commitment to *dharma*. Arjuna begins verbally correcting Uttara by reminding him (*śādhi*) of his princely, *kṣatriya* birth. Arjuna re-orders Uttara to anchor his feet and stand as his conch horn again resounds with earth-shattering

force. Repeatedly offering words of encouragement, it is Arjuna's rightly discerned perception and knowledge that changes the fortunes of the day. The *Mhba* then proceeds to describe Arjuna burning with fire like the fires at the world's destruction.<sup>862</sup>

Arjuna's command to stand, remember *dharma*, and trust is a critical pre-war, combat context story. The scene corresponds with Arjuna's crisis, yet the *Mhba* reverses the roles. Arjuna is Kṛṣṇa; Uttara is Arjuna. The repeated theme of masculinity informs Kṛṣṇa's warning in *Bg* 2.3. On a deeper level, Uttara's story is about a *kṣatriya* momentarily disregarding his *dharma*-dictated, caste-required purpose *because* he has allowed the everyday experiences of war to dominate his mind. He faced disgrace if he could not overcome those emotions and trust that Arjuna's presence guaranteed victory. Like Uttara, Arjuna in the *Bg* must overcome his unmasculine stature through his single-minded, indifferent combat. The time for being someone you are not has come and gone; the time for hiding is over. He must overcome his emotions and trust Kṛṣṇa's teaching and presence *with* him, for the last thing he is is a coward.

## 5.6 *Mohas*: Confusion

Whereas Arjuna initially identified the source of his crisis as *śokam*, he expands his final reasoning by admitting that he is experiencing a confused state. The more common translation is "delusion," but I opt for "confusion" (*mohas*).<sup>863</sup> The building emotions are making him confused and indecisive.

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<sup>862</sup> Ganguli, *Virata Parvan*, LV, 94.

<sup>863</sup> Fosse's translation, "opacity of illusion," implies that Arjuna's obstacle to which he must move beyond is "nontransparency," or an illusion characterized by a lack of clarity, cloudiness. Fosse, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 22. For instance, acting like a eunuch on the battlefield. Fosse offers no commentary as to what he means by "opacity of illusion."

The *Bg* places *mohas* at *Bg* 11.1 and *Bg* 18.73. The two examples are structurally significant, for they appear to conclude the two major blocks of Kṛṣṇa’s oral teaching (*Bg* 2.10-10.42 and *Bg* 12.1-18.72).<sup>864</sup> *Mohas* is the primary obstacle that Arjuna must overcome. As a philosophical term of the *Mhba*, it means “delusion of mind” and “preventing discernment of the truth and making men believe in the reality of the worldly objects.”<sup>865</sup> He has “fallen into error” *due* to his “confusion” (see *mohāt*, *Bg* 2.63; 18.7, 60).<sup>866</sup> His sentimentality and erroneous decisions have become a *mohakalila*, “a thicket or snare of illusion.”<sup>867</sup> Symbolic commentators, like Easwaran, argue that *Bg* 1 prepares the reader for the commencement of the physical war at Kurukṣetra. But, the combat context ceases to be relevant as it becomes “the bridge” to the “real subjects of the Gita.”<sup>868</sup> Therefore, the combat context is superfluous to spiritual seekers, advocating it “need not detain us too long in our study.”<sup>869</sup> His use of “too long” implies that spiritual seekers may or even *should* tarry for a brief time, but ultimately, the application of the poem is to be the universal, “spiritual struggle, not a worldly one.”<sup>870</sup> As a “timeless, practical manual for daily living,” Easwaran may argue that Arjuna’s request in *Bg* 2.7 would be for Kṛṣṇa to reorder his perception of the “struggle for self-mastery.” The combat context is only a “metaphor for the perennial war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness in every human

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<sup>864</sup> Each block of teaching functions to elevate *Bg* 11 to the climax of the dialogue. In *Bg* 18.73, Arjuna confirms his movement from disorder to order from *Bg* 2.11-10.42, acknowledging the deeper teaching of *Bg* 12.1-18.72, affirming he is now combat-ready and, therefore, will rise from his seat to stand, fight and kill.<sup>864</sup> In the coming days at Kuru Field, he will “execute” (*karīṣye*) the work of Kṛṣṇa’s “command” (*vacanam*, see *Bg* 3.8) of which he pledged prior to the war and at the conclusion of his dialogue. Furthermore, *Bg* 18.73 is in agreement with Kṛṣṇa’s summative question of his crisis as ignorant delusion (*Bg* 18.72, *ajñānasammohas*).

<sup>865</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 836.

<sup>866</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 836.

<sup>867</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 836..

<sup>868</sup> Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 75.

<sup>869</sup> Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 74.

<sup>870</sup> Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 75.

heart.”<sup>871</sup> So also, Ranchor Prime, who infers from this verse, “When we are overwhelmed by life’s complexities, we do well to accept help with openness and humility.”<sup>872</sup>

In *Bg* 11.1, Arjuna’s declaration implies he has rightly heard, processed, and discerned the content of Kṛṣṇa’s restorative teaching, allowing him to affirm that his *moha*s is “removed.”<sup>873</sup> Given the following vision of Kṛṣṇa, his confession in v1 implies that he has no confusion regarding his duty to be Kṛṣṇa’s agent of death to the Kurus (*Bg* 11.33). Thus, he heard and understood Kṛṣṇa with an unconfused mind. However, the state of removal is not solely due to his response. Ultimately, his reordered state of mind is “by” Kṛṣṇa’s teaching of the “supreme secret, the Supreme Soul,” the direct result of Kṛṣṇa’s “kindness” to him, and through Kṛṣṇa’s “illuminating lamp of knowledge” within him (*cf.* *Bg* 10.11). Thus, Arjuna concludes in *Bg* 18.73 that his restored combat status was a function of “grace” *and* his restored capacity to “remember” (*smṛtis*).<sup>874</sup>

Overall, *moha*s is employed 29 times in various forms (*Bg* 2.52, 63; 3.2, 3.40; 4.16, 35; 7.13, 27, 28; 9.12; 10.4; 38, 11.1; 14.8, 13, 17, 18, 22, 39; 16.10, 15, 16; 17.16, 18.7, 25, 39, 60, 72, 73).<sup>875</sup> Its first occurrence in *Bg* 2.52 is combined with *kalilaṃ* to mean a “trap,” or “thicket of delusion” (Sargeant, Hill),<sup>876</sup> a “snare of delusion” (Tsoukalas),<sup>877</sup> a “dense forest of delusion” (Prabhupada).<sup>878</sup> Tsoukalas translates *buddhis* as the “correct mental attitude” that must find its

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<sup>871</sup> Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 21.

<sup>872</sup> Ranchor, *Bhagavad Gita: Talks Between the Soul and God*, 14.

<sup>873</sup> Both *viḡata* (*vi* + *√gam*) in *Bg* 11.1 and *naṣṭas* (*√naś*) in *Bg* 18.73 are present passive participles pointing to the instrumental agency of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>874</sup> *Tvat prasādān* is an ablative, i.e., from Kṛṣṇa who is the source of grace and kindness, See Whitney, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, 286. The noun *smṛtis* and the corresponding preposition *mayā* (“by me”) are instrumentals of accompaniment or agency, Whitney, 280.

<sup>875</sup> See also, Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 117,

<sup>876</sup> Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 137; Hill, *The Bhagavad-Gita with English Translation and Commentary*, 91

<sup>877</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1., 243.

<sup>878</sup> Prabhupada, *The Bhagavad Gītā As It Is*, 119.

way beyond the obstacle of delusion.<sup>879</sup> Fowler reads the former as “integrated in intellect” which must “transcend the muck of delusion.”<sup>880</sup> I suggest that the use of “integrated” (*yukta*) implies that there is a missing meta-principle (*buddhis*) ordering Arjuna’s interior life because *mohas* has disordered his perception and reasoning in combat. In other words, there is no integration between what he sees and reasons because of the negative impact of *mohas*. His *kṣatriya* mindset is disjointed from his warcraft because there is no longer a unifying warrior discipline enabling him to fulfill his purpose.

Finally, Ranganathanada opts for “taint of delusion,” of which I infer the spiritually detrimental aspect of *mohas*.<sup>881</sup> Kṛṣṇa warns Arjuna by contrasting the character of those who remain disciplined to truth (*sattva*) with those whom (*rajas*) and ignorant darkness (*tamas*) dominated their capacities to perceive and reason their next move. Kṛṣṇa describes the latter as demonically born (*cf.* *Bg* 14.22-26 and *Bg* 16.11). Warrior translates Śaṅkara as “mist of illusion,” whereby I infer, combined with v53, his comments may illuminate the conditional role in what only appears to be an insurmountable misperception (like a fine mist lightly obscuring one’s view) of the battlefield.<sup>882</sup> Arjuna had a real-time battlefield decision before him, knowing he was not clear-headed. Much rests upon Arjuna’s decision.<sup>883</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1., 240.

<sup>880</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 41.

<sup>881</sup> Ranganathananda, *Bhagavad Gita*, 209. He comments that this is indicative of our common human struggle when we cease to be clear headed. This is the result of our undisciplined process of mental perception (all kinds of ideas, 210). When we are, our minds will traverse the “ocean” of delusion. We may even go beyond Vendantic scriptures.

<sup>882</sup> Warrior, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, vol. 1, 73-74. His first note on v53 follows the logic, “If you ask when” then “you will obtain.” He refers to the “discriminative knowledge of the Self through the destruction of the mist of delusion,” which will allow him to “attain to Yoga proper (*paramārthayoga*), or the discipline of uniting to the Supreme Object.

<sup>883</sup> Several of these verses overlap categories, but for causes of *mohas*, see the contexts of *Bg* 2.63; 3.40; 7.27-28; 9.12; 14.8, 17; 16.16; 18.39. For the impact of *mohas*, see the contexts of *Bg* 3.16; 7.27; 18.7,16, 60. For the characteristics of *mohas*, see the contexts of *Bg* 4.16; 10.38; 12.19; 16.10; 17.16; 18.7. For references to the company of those who are obstructed by *mohas*, see the contexts of *Bg* 10.38; 12.19; 16.10, 15; 17.16; 18.7. For references to characteristics of those who have transcended *mohas*, see the contexts of *Bg* 9.12; 10.14; 14.22.

## 5.7 Śādhi: Arjuna Humbled and Desiring Re-order

All is not lost. Arjuna’s despondent crisis ends with a ray of hope shining in the darkness of despair. Despite his conclusion that he will not fight in the war (*Bg* 2.9), Arjuna perceives that he is no longer combat ready, much less combat effective. Yet, he knows he must move forward for his well-being or hope is lost; therefore, Ranganathananda translates the final two *ślokas* of *Bg* 2.7, “. . . I am asking you: tell me definitely what will prove beneficial to me. I am your disciple; teach me (*śādhi mām*), who has surrendered to you.”<sup>884</sup> When Arjuna requests Kṛṣṇa to “correct” (*śādhi*) him, one finds a humble desire to return to his former state *because* he is aware that the passions of *śoka* have dis-ordered his ability to discern reality. As a result, *śoka* hindered his ability to navigate beyond *mohas*. Arjuna’s crisis is that he knows his pre-war commitment, but he cannot see a way of fulfilling it and not inflicting extreme violence upon his kin. He is in a *dharma* stalemate. As he projects his perception of what will happen after the war, he sees no way past the *śokam* (“sorrowful guilt”) that is traumatizing the function of his “senses” (*indriyāṇām*, *Bg* 2.8).<sup>885</sup> Tsoukalas notes that the “quest for truth” begins with perception (*pratyakṣa*), which then leads to an informed and reasoned understanding (*anumāna*) of reality.<sup>886</sup> However, *śokam* has negatively impacted his sense organs (*indriya*) which supply the sensory data. Ranganathananda translates, “my inborn nature has been overwhelmed by the bane of faint-heartedness,” hence he is “confused as regards my dharma or duty.”<sup>887</sup> Arjuna states that *śokam* has “dried up” his “faculties of

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<sup>884</sup> Ranganathananda, *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1, 102.

<sup>885</sup> The gerund *avāpya* (“having obtained”) implies that what he is perceiving at that moment will surely follow the “unrivaled and prosperous rule” (*asapatnam rddham rājyaṃ*) he will win through his combat.

<sup>886</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 120.

<sup>887</sup> Ranganathananda, *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1, 102.

sense.”<sup>888</sup> Therefore, his statement, “Truly, I cannot perceive ...” is based on a *śokam*-tainted sensory process.<sup>889</sup> I suggest that Arjuna requires an *epistemological* re-ordering so that he “*may see* [and understand] what *should* remove this sorrow” that was at that time “drying up” his [faculties] of sense.” (*Bg* 2.8). If Arjuna accepts that he must fight and kill (*Bg* 18.43), he can remove the confusion and re-order his *ksatrarman* (*Bg* 2.7).<sup>890</sup> If he can overcome his temporary emotions and inclination to mourn and regret (*Bg* 2.8), he can fulfill his pre-war commitment. In his human development, if he remains in control, Arjuna may respond in every combat situation as Ranganathananda comments, “But man can control feelings, then try to understand the environment, then adapt oneself to that situation.”<sup>891</sup>

## Summary

In this chapter, I examined the central terms of Arjuna’s crisis. I described how his trauma resembled the nonphysical trauma of *karmanighora*. Kṛṣṇa’s focus will be on Arjuna’s perception and understanding and his ability to know the nature of killing in combat. Having done so, he may patiently endure the impermanent traumas associated with the reality of war in the *dharma* deficient *Kali Yuga*. In the following chapter, I will show how Kṛṣṇa “corrects” or “re-orders” Arjuna for combat readiness and effectiveness *through* his *guṇa-karma* epistemology.

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<sup>888</sup> For “drying up,” see the m. acc. sg. *ucchoṣaṇam*. For the option “faculties of sense,” see *indriyāṇām* in the lexical option on p.120.

<sup>889</sup> “Truly, I cannot see” is a pr. indic. act, “*na hi prapaśyāmi*.”

<sup>890</sup> The term *ksatrarman* is used by Kṛṣṇa in *Bg* 18.43 in the context of combat per a warrior’s intrinsic caste nature (*svabhāvajam*) predicated by the *guṇas* (*svabhāvaprabhavāis*, *Bg* 18.41). These caste actions, ultimately originating from the creative will of Kṛṣṇa are listed as heroism (*śāuryam*), majesty (*tejas*), courage (*dhṛtis*), skillfulness in battle (*dākṣyam*), and not retreating from the battlefield (*yuddhe*), generosity (*dānam*), royal attitude (*īśvarabhāvaś*). *Dhṛtis* and the locative *yuddhe* may be intentional by Kṛṣṇa in lieu of Arjuna’s perception and reasoning. See Divanji for variant reading of v43.

<sup>891</sup> Ranganathananda, *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1, 97.

## Chapter 6

### Kṛṣṇa's *Guṇa-Karma* Epistemology

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the three key terms that comprise Kṛṣṇa's *guṇa-karma* epistemology. For example, Kṛṣṇa orders Arjuna not to mourn like those who are uninformed because he is to see the battlefield as Kṛṣṇa sees the battlefield. He is to know the nature of combat as Kṛṣṇa has ordered the reality of war, and he is to endure the nonphysical traumas of *karmanighora* as a *kṣatriya*, trained and prepared to fulfill his pre-war commitment. *Bg* 2.11-30 is the kernel of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi*, and the two imperatives, "endure with patient maturity" (*titikṣasva*) and "know" (*viddhi*), frame what it means to be combat ready in the *Kali Yuga*.<sup>892</sup>

Kṛṣṇa intends his *śādhi* to re-order Arjuna's *guṇa-karma* epistemological means of perceiving and reasoning on the battlefield. The imperative *titikṣasva* pertains to the common nonphysical traumas of *karmanighora*. The imperative *viddhi* pertains to knowing the ontological/theological nature of how Kṛṣṇa ordered combat and war. Ultimately, Kṛṣṇa will substantiate his *śādhi* by allowing Arjuna to "see" (*paśya*) his "Cosmic/Lordly Form" (*rupamaiśvara*), whereby Arjuna will fulfill his commitment (to kill) as an act of *kṣatriya* worship. The final experience of *śādhi* will be Arjuna's understanding that 'God' is with him when he sees Sthānu going before him in battle. I will now examine the three meta-epistemological imperatives of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi*: see, endure, and know.

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<sup>892</sup> *Śādhi* is to be understood in this thesis as Kṛṣṇa's restorative teaching. See lexical options for the root  $\sqrt{tij}$ , Monier-Williams, *An Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 446. I will more often translate as *titikṣasva* "patiently endure."



## 6.1 *Paśya/Prapaśya*: “See!”

The function of “seeing” is *the* meta-epistemic concept in the *Bg*. To “see” is to recognize the material battlefield and the ontological/theological truth predicating mortal combat. A form of the imperative is employed 8x,<sup>893</sup> and the root appears 25x in other variations.<sup>894</sup> In addition, the *Bg* commonly substitutes *paśya* with the imperative *darśa* from  $\sqrt{drṣ}$ .<sup>895</sup> Monier Williams provides a broader lexical and semantic range. For example, one finds the verb  $\sqrt{paś}$  in *Manu* and the *Mhba* with the sense of continuing action, e.g., “while he looks on,” “before his eyes,” “live to see,” “to experience,” “to have insight,” “discernment,” and “I am convinced.” In the *Rig Veda* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, we find the sense of “to see with the spiritual eye.” Similarly, the verb  $\sqrt{drṣ}$  has a broader range in the *Mhba* of “to see with the mind”<sup>896</sup> Though he saw the Kurus across the field, he temporarily could not *see* and *discern* the battlefield with the proper “spiritual eye.”

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<sup>893</sup> For the 2p impv. act. *paśya*, see *Bg* 1:3, 25; 9:5, 11:5, 8, 13. For the 2s impv. act with the prefix *pra*, see *Bg* 11.49. For the 3s sg. Imp. act. *apaśyat*, see *Bg* 1.25. For 3p pr. ind. *na + paśyanti*, see *Bg* 1.38; 13.25. For the 3s pr. ind. act. *paśyati*, see *Bg* 2.29; 5.5(x2); 6.30, 32; 13.29(x2); 15.10, 11; 18.16(x2). With the prefix *anu*, see *Bg* 13.30; 14.29. For the 3p pl. pr. ind. act. with the prefixes *na + anu +*, see *Bg* 15.10. For them. Inst. pl. pr. prtc with the prefix *pra + paśyayadbhis*, see *Bg* 1.39. For the m. gen. sg. pr. prtc. *paśyatas*, see *Bg* 2.69. For the m. nom. sg. pr. prtc. with the prefix *sam*, see *Bg* 3.20. For the 3p pl. ind. act. *paśyanty*, see *Bg* 14.11. Divanji notes that *prapasya* implies to see “minutely or visualize.” For, the adv. modification of the impv in reference to the perceptions of the Kuru participants, see *pramukhataḥ*, *Bg* 1.26. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 86, 92.

<sup>894</sup> Monier-Williams, 611 and footnote, 922. However, the concept of ‘knowing’ (*viddhi*) in all of its forms appears more often than “seeing.”

<sup>895</sup> See Monier-Williams, 491. For the 2p sg. causative impv. act., “cause yourself to be seen by me,” *me tvam darśayātmānam avyayam*, see *Bg* 11.4. In *Bg* 11.5, see the object of Kṛṣṇa’s impv., “immutable *Ātman*, *ātmānam avyayam*. As the m. nom. sg. *amadarśanaḥ*, see *Bg* 6.29. As the n. acc. sg. BV cpd. *anekādbhutadarśanam*, see *Bg* 11.11. As the causative periphrastic perf *darśayām* with  $\sqrt{ās}$ , see *Bg* 11.9, 50. As the n. acc. sg. *sudurdarśam*, see *Bg* 11.52. As the n. nom. sg. TP cpd of the inferred contextual translation of the constant perception of *karmanighora* with equimiminity, *janmamṛtyujarāvyādhiduhkhadoṣānudarśanam*, see *Bg* 13.8. As the “constant knowledge of the Supreme *Ātman*, *adhyātmajñānanyatvam*, see *Bg* 11.11. It appears 5x in the infinitive, *draṣṭum*, *Bg* 11.3, 4, 7, 8, 46. For the gerund *drṣṭvā*, see *Bg* 1.2, 20, 28; 2.59; 11.20, 23, 24, 45, 49, 51. For the n. nom. sg. p. pass. prtc. *drṣṭas*, see *Bg* 2.16. For the p. pass. prtc. with negation (‘a’), *adrṣṭa*, see *Bg* 11.6, 45. For the 3p pl. pr. pass. prtc. with prefix *sam*, *samdrṣyante*, see *Bg* 11.27. For the n. nom. sg. *drṣṭavān*, see *Bg* 11.52, 53. For the f. acc. sg. *drṣṭim*, see *Bg* 11.9. For the combination of the impv. *viddhi* + the m. nom. sg. p. pass. prtc. *vidhidrṣṭas*, see *Bg* 17.11.

<sup>896</sup> See Monier-Williams, 491.

### 6.1.1 Concentrations of √paś and √dr̥ṣ

The *Bg* concentrates references to the faculty of sight in chapters 1 and 11,<sup>897</sup> corresponding with Arjuna’s perception of the Kurus and his climactic vision of the *rūpamaiśvara*. *Bg* 1 has a balanced dispersion of imperatives (2x), imperfects, gerunds, and indicative mood. The use of √paś addresses Arjuna’s present understanding of reality based on what he saw across Kurukṣetra, i.e., he was processing external and internal conflict. Consequently, he becomes disordered. However, in *Bg* 11, one finds another balanced usage of imperatives (10x), infinitives (14x), and gerunds (10x) that dominate the perception and reasoning of Arjuna’s unique experience.<sup>898</sup> For example, Kṛṣṇa temporarily gifts Arjuna a “divine eye” (*Bg* 11.8).<sup>899</sup> In *Bg* 11, the focus is on the implication of his future understanding of reality based on *having* seen Kṛṣṇa’s “cosmic form” (*rūpamaiśvara*) and then Kṛṣṇa’s return to his “human” (*mānuṣam*), “four-armed form” (*rūpeṇa caturbhujena*).

The two concentrations of the occurrences elevate the importance of the two chapters. The faculty of sight began the crisis (*Bg* 1.25). Seeing will become the ultimate solution to his predicament (*rūpamaiśvara*), but seeing the vision is not the climax of the chapter. The traditional way of understanding *Bg* 11 is to present the vision of the *rūpamaiśvara* as the climax of the *Bg* (see endnote for diagram).<sup>i</sup> However, I assert that the chapter’s climax is Arjuna’s call to worship in *Bg* 11.35-46. It is after Arjuna sees the *rūpamaiśvara* that he embraces his act of worship to be Kṛṣṇa’s instrument of death (to all those whom Kṛṣṇa has already killed; see *Bg* 11.33-34). I have accordingly diagramed *Bg* 11 in the appendix.<sup>ii</sup> Seeing the *rūpamaiśvara* is *not* the climax, be it ever so grand. Instead, it functions as the ultimate *means* for substantiating Arjuna’s “work,” his

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<sup>897</sup> In *Bg* 1, there are ten direct references from the verbs √paś and √dr̥ṣ; twenty-seven in *Bg* 11.

<sup>898</sup> For example, see the repetition of *dr̥ṣtvā* in *Bg* 11.23, 24, 25, 45, 49, 51, 52.

<sup>899</sup> *divyaṃ dadāmi te cakṣus*.

commitment to fulfilling his pre-war promise by fulfilling Kṛṣṇa’s work (*Bg* 11.55). When Arjuna sees Kṛṣṇa, he is to understand Kṛṣṇa’s human form infused by the knowledge (*jnana*) of the *rūpamaiśvara*. It is not unrealistic to consider that Arjuna remembered the vision of Kṛṣṇa devouring his foes *as* he slew them with Gāṇḍīva. Furthermore, it is never *just* Kṛṣṇa with Arjuna in battle; it is always the ‘Cosmic Kṛṣṇa’ moving the age (*yuga*) toward dissolution *as* he drives Arjuna’s chariot.

### 6.1.2 Seeing Kṛṣṇa as the *Rūpamaiśvara*

By *Bg* 11.1, Arjuna can declare the removal of his former disordered state of mind, “my *mohas* has been removed.”<sup>900</sup> His declaration implies that he has heard and rightly understood Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* (*Bg* 2.10-10.42).<sup>901</sup> More importantly, he has learned and applied it to his situation. When Arjuna saw the *rūpamaiśvara* (*Bg* 11.5-14), he responded much differently than when he beheld his opponents across the battlefield. He ceased responding as a confused *kṣatriya*. In contrast, he immediately responded like the *ideal* example of Sañjaya in the epilogue (*cf.* Ch. 1.3.3-1.3.4).

Yet, looking forward, Arjuna is not an example of an ideal *kṣatriya* because only one-fourth of *dharma* is possible in the *Kali Yuga*. As cited earlier, McGrath reminded us that all actions are mere “approximations of faithfulness.” The *Bg* presents Arjuna’s positive reception of

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<sup>900</sup> *Cf.* *Bg* 6.6. *paramaṃ guhyam*, *Bg* 11.1. For “supreme secret,” see *Bg* 11.1; 18.75. See *Bg* 9.1, *guhyatamaṃ*. For the interrelation of other concepts, see *Bg* 9.2, “royal knowledge, royal secret,” *rājavidyā rājaguhyam*; *Bg* 15. 20 for the explanation of Kṛṣṇa’s “teaching/doctrine,” *iti guhyatamaṃ śāstram*. I infer orthodoxy. For the summative and conclusive theological secret “more secret than secret,” *jñānam ākhyātaṃ guhyād guhyataram mayā*, see *Bg* 18.63. For Kṛṣṇa’s command to “hear” his “word” based on his love for Arjuna which is “more secret than secret,” see *sarvaguhyatamaṃ bhūyah śṛṇu me paramaṃ vacaḥ iṣṭosi me dṛḍham iti*, *Bg* 11.64. For his exclusive agential claim for his “supreme secret,” see *ya idaṃ paramaṃ guhyaṃ madbhakteṣv abhidhāsyati*, *Bg* 11.68.

<sup>901</sup> While that was his present reality, the combat-context will reveal that his *mohas* had been removed *for the time being*. See *moho 'yam vigato mama*, “my [former state of] delusion is [for the time being] gone.” *Bg* 11.1 where *vigatas* is a m. nom. sg. pa. pass. part. of *vi + √gam*.

*śādhi* up to that point (*Bg* 2.10-10.42), and his response of awe and worship is to be the model response to seeing Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield. Yet, later, at times, he is a confused, broken-hearted, disparaging, a traumatized human being with moments of brilliance and fidelity to Kṛṣṇa. Shortly after this vision, he will struggle to remain singularly focused on Kṛṣṇa. It is as if he no longer remembers the *rūpamaiśvara*. The *Mhba* presents several versions of Arjuna. First, he is the hero of the age who breaks down before the war to end all wars. Second, he is the exclusive recipient of Kṛṣṇa’s *rūpamaiśvara* who cannot last the day without re-experiencing some of the same types of traumas seen in *Bg* 1. Thirdly, he restores his brother, yet he is also the *kṣatriya* struggling from the impact of *karmaṇighora* who Kṛṣṇa must restore again and again. Therefore, having seen the ultimate revelation of the Supreme Being *did not* make Arjuna immune to nonphysical trauma nor entirely resistant to the experience of savage violence. The *Mhba* appears to portray Arjuna in combat as if *Bg* 11 never happened. Or, is there a force so debilitating that it could cause Arjuna to act as if he had not seen and understood the most profound meaning of Kṛṣṇa in the epic?

### 6.1.3 *Karmaṇighora* as Kṛṣṇa’s Body

Arjuna’s response to the *rūpamaiśvara* is that he realizes himself within the “Universal Form” (*viśvarūpa*, *Bg* 11.16) at the dissolution of the universe, purposed to kill those whom Kṛṣṇa has already destined to be killed (*Bg* 11.34).<sup>902</sup> The *viśvarūpa* more accurately carries the sense of the universe being the form/the body of the lower nature of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>903</sup> Therefore, when Arjuna sees Kṛṣṇa’s body “everywhere,” he recognizes Kṛṣṇa’s transcendent “higher nature” from which the physical creation originates.<sup>904</sup> Having seen the vision, Arjuna invoked a universal call to worship

<sup>902</sup> Arjuna see the form of the universe (*viśvarūpa*) as Kṛṣṇa (*viśveśvara*).

<sup>903</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 4, 189.

<sup>904</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 4, 189. In V16, Arjuna identify’s Kṛṣṇa’s body *as* the universe (*paśyāmi tvām*), while simultaneously perceiving his transcendent, omnipresent “lordly” nature *in* and different from the non-transcendent creation (*paśyāmi viśveśvara viśvarūpa*). Thus, Tsoukalas infers his ontology of “identity in transcendent, indwelling difference.” Given the following discussion regarding Arjuna as a unique representative

for all beings to repent in the same way he modeled his *newly reordered guṇa-karma* epistemology.<sup>905</sup> Whereas he wrongly assumed the responsibility of being the representative agent of all *kṣatriyas* in *Bg* 1, he now rightly projects his experience upon all living beings.<sup>906</sup> In this way, he brings a unique authority, for he alone has beheld the *rūpamaiśvara*.<sup>907</sup> As the model, his kin and allies would have seen him and fought with emboldened confidence.

Moreover, his call to worship is an example of a synergistic or ‘co-missional’ relationship. For instance, he speaks in an indicative mood concerning the response of the universe (*Bg* 11.36). A rightly ordered “universe” is “presently and continuously rejoicing” (*jagat prahr̥ṣyaty*), “gratified at this time” (*anurajyate*) on account of Kṛṣṇa’s exclusively “renowned” status.<sup>908</sup> In the *Mhba*, the verb *prakīrtayati* is “to reveal, declare,” therefore, I infer with the instrumental use of *prakīrtyā*, the sense of rejoicing, gratification, terror, and worship *through* the proclamation of Kṛṣṇa’s glorious status *when* he is fully known.<sup>909</sup> He further speaks of the future worship of the “*siddhas*” (*namasyanti*, v36), the universal ridiculousness of “not revering Kṛṣṇa” (*nameran*, v37, 39-40), Kṛṣṇa’s exclusive ontology (v37, 40, 43), and the necessity of an internal reflection upon intentional and unintentional transgressions (see v41-42).<sup>910</sup> Before this vision, he was dominated

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because of this experience, we may infer that his perception in this verse also is to be read what any *kṣatriya* may comprehend.

<sup>905</sup> His command of universal worship can imply that he intends the vision to be shared with all Hindus and non-Hindus (see Ch. 1.3).

<sup>906</sup> Note the latter’s lack of a divine rebuke in *Bg* 11 (*cf.* *Bg* 2.2-4).

<sup>907</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, vol., 2, 828. In his commentary following the *rupamaisvara*, he refers to Arjuna as the “representative devotee.”

<sup>908</sup> Both *prahr̥ṣyaty* and *anurajyate* are pr. indic. 3ps, but the former is an active. For Kṛṣṇa’s “fame,” see *prakīrtyā*, *Bg* 11.36). The term *prakīrtyā* commonly translated “fame” or “renown” is an instrumental of means (see Whitney, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 94). However, there is an instrumental of accompaniment which one may infer it is the body rejoicing. See Ranganathananda referencing the universe is his form, vol. 4, 313. Here I condense all “demons” (*rakṣāṃsi*) and “perfected ones,” (*siddhasaṃghāh*) non-transcendent beings.

<sup>909</sup> See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 4, 257. See Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 201. Tsoukalas and Fowler opt for *Siddhas* over the more popular “perfected ones.” The *Siddhas* were semi-divine (perfected) beings who worshiped Kṛṣṇa ( fut. act. ind. 3p, *namasyanti*). The opposite are the “demons” who “run for their lives in all directions.”

<sup>910</sup> *Bg* 11.41-42.

by the *guṇas* causing him not to recognize how he may have taken advantage of their unique friendship (*sakheti*) and mutual affection (*praṇayena*). He confessed how his “ignorance” might have caused him not to acknowledge Kṛṣṇa’s “majesty” (*ajānatā mahimānam*) and the latent disrespectfulness (*asatkṛtas*) of who his friend is *in light of* all that he has seen and understood from the vision of the *rūpamaiśvaram*.<sup>911</sup>

For Arjuna, war is worship (v55). The vision is the ultimate means of convincing Arjuna that worship (*bhakti yoga*) is at the center of everything, for everyone, everywhere. Therefore, he cannot fully worship Kṛṣṇa and refuse to fulfill his *dharma* to kill. Combat is his means of worship, and it begins with rightly perceiving the nature of combat and the reality of war. The following accounts illustrate the role of seeing (perceiving) the battlefield.

#### **6.1.4 Droṇa Parvan, CCII-CCIII: Arjuna as the Instrument of Sthānu**

After both armies leave the field for the day, the *Mhba* retells Arjuna’s unawareness. Arjuna is the day's hero, portrayed as confident, committed, and competent. Upon returning, he retold the scene of a blue figure fighting before him during the battle, but he did not know the being’s identity. He described the figure as blazing like fire, striking down his opponent before his engagement. Arjuna tells Vyāsa that he did not kill anyone who was not already slain by this blue figure constantly before *his* chariot.<sup>912</sup> Vyāsa explains that the blue figure is Śaṅkara. Following this revelation, Vyāsa rolls off an extensive description of attributes and other names by which

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<sup>911</sup> Interestingly, in v42, Arjuna refers to his declarations in *Bg* 1.20-2.7 “as if his purpose was humor” (*yac cāvahāsārtham*). The first response of Kṛṣṇa is to laugh at his arguments (*Bg* 2.8). The latter is the more deeply offensive transgression.

<sup>912</sup> Context seems to point to the blue figure remaining in front his chariot alone, not before every chariot. Although, it is certainly possible for the *Bg* does have a universal implication that all who kill in battle do not actually kill for Kṛṣṇa has already killed them (*Bg* 11.34). It may be that the lesser men are not able to see Kṛṣṇa due to their status.

devotees know the ‘Lord of the Universe.’ For example, Śaṅkara is known as the “First Cause,” “Divine Lord,” “protector of the universe,” “great Master,” “giver of boons,” “Īśāna,” “Mahadeva,” “Supreme Soul,” the “one only Lord,” Rudra, Hara, Māheśvara, and Sthānu.<sup>913</sup> The name Sthānu appears four times in a co-equal relationship with Śaṅkara, for instance, “That boon-giving lord of the universe, that Supreme Deity, is also called *Hara* and *Sthanu*.”<sup>914</sup>

I suggest that Arjuna saw Śaṅkara, who is also Sthānu, who is also Kṛṣṇa. He could perceive his actions but could not recognize his identity *until explained*. I will later return to this account, but I note that Arjuna’s faculty of sight allowed him to see Sthānu but not yet perceive his identity *though* he was accomplishing for him what Kṛṣṇa promised to him in *Bg* 11.33. Tsouklaas translates the final lines of v33, “By me alone were these again killed *in former times*. Be the mere instrument, O ambidextrous one.”<sup>915</sup> As Tsoukalas explains, Arjuna is to confidently stand, fight, and kill as Kṛṣṇa’s agent because Kṛṣṇa will again slay the Kurus as he has already done so “in former times,” meaning former embodied lives. Therefore, given Arjuna’s countless former embodiments, he is to “become the mere instrument [again]” as he had done so in former times.<sup>916</sup> Kṛṣṇa is promising to Arjuna what Arjuna eventually sees Sthānu doing, which is what he [Kṛṣṇa] has already done countless times over in former lives.

## 6.2 Titikṣasva: “Endure [with patient maturity]!”

Combat readiness and completing his pre-war commitment means learning how to respond to *karma's* nonphysical traumas of *karmaṇighora*. In section 6.1, I explained how the function of

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<sup>913</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCII. Māheśvara is “Great Lord,” Great ,” from *Māha* + Śiva.

<sup>914</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCII.

<sup>915</sup> Tsoukalas, Steven, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 4, 244. Emphasis mine.

<sup>916</sup> *nimittamātraṃ bhava*.

seeing the battlefield also meant rightly understanding the nature of combat. Properly “seeing” the reality of the battlefield informs all other imperatives in the *Bg* because the function of “sight” is *the* epistemological meta-imperative of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī*. In this section, I explain the daily imperative to “patiently endure” the impermanent experiences expected before, in, and after combat. In the following section, I will explain the significance of the command to “know” the nature of war.

### 6.2.1 The Significance of the Inclusion of *Bg* 2.11-30

On a book level, the *Bg* framed its content with the negative future tense *yotsa* (“I shall not fight,” *Bg* 2.9) and the positive future tense *karisyē* (“I [myself] will do your command” (*Bg* 8.73)).<sup>917</sup> The function of the contrasting futures focuses the reader inward to the content of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching (*śādhī*) and Arjuna’s response (*Bg* 2.10 to 18.72). *Bg* 2.11-30 can be understood as Kṛṣṇa’s ‘Basic Training’ (*Bg* 2.11-10.42).<sup>918</sup> *Bg* 12.1-18.72 can be understood as ‘Advanced Training.’

Kṛṣṇa’s basic training begins in *Bg* 2.11-30 with the commands to “patiently endure” the positive and negative experiences of combat (*titikṣasva*, v14) and then “know” (*viddhi*, v17) the ontological/theological nature of war. The first imperative is a direct response to Arjuna’s conclusion in v8, “I truly do not presently see what may [possibly] remove my [ongoing] sorrow.”<sup>919</sup> In v11, Kṛṣṇa declares the wrongness of Arjuna’s response, “You are continually

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<sup>917</sup>The *Bg* has the assertive particle *ha*.

<sup>918</sup> His ‘Advanced Training’ will be found in *Bg* 12.1-11.72.

<sup>919</sup> See *na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād yac chokam*. The verb *prapaśyāmi* is an ind. pr. act. 1ps of *pra* +  $\sqrt{\text{paś}}$  which denotes his understanding of reality at that moment. The imp. implies an incomplete and ongoing action.



mourning those who are not to be mourned.”<sup>920</sup> In v30, Kṛṣṇa ends with, “Therefore, you are capable of not mourning anyone.”<sup>921</sup> The two verbs form a smaller inclusio, which directs the reader to the central point in v18, “Therefore, fight!” In other words, Arjuna perceives and concludes what he cannot do in combat; Kṛṣṇa declares what he can do in battle. The command to “patiently endure” in v12-14 follows three brief teachings: the shared eternality of Kṛṣṇa and humanity in v12, the nature of the “embodied *atman*” (*dehinas*) v13, and the impermanent nature of combat experiences (v14). The command “to know” pertains to the relationship between the material world and the “indestructible” (*avināśī*) *Ātman* (Kṛṣṇa) from which the universe originates and comes forth as his creation (v16-17).

## 6.2.2 Enduring *karmanighora* with Patience and Maturity

The first component of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* directly addresses the physical and nonphysical experiences of battle. In this case, it is the “sorrowful regret” (*śoka*) that Arjuna feels before the war. The middle imperative *titikṣasva* appears only in *Bg* 2.14. It expresses a dimension of Arjuna’s integrated interior life that one must master if one desires to remain combat ready and effective in war.<sup>922</sup> The middle voice implies that Arjuna must actively participate in the struggle; he must “desire to endure” his experiences. Its broader semantic range in the *Mhba* and the *Rig Veda* often carries the sense of “sharpen.”<sup>923</sup> I infer both meanings convey the idiom, ‘iron

<sup>920</sup> For “you are continually mourning,” in *Bg* 2.11, see *anvaśocas* (imp. act. 2s from *anu* + *√śuc*).

<sup>921</sup> For “Therefore, you are capable of not mourning anyone,” see *tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam śocitum arhasi*. The verb *arhasi* (pr. indic. act. 2s *√arh*) conveys what he is able to do at that moment and in the following days.

<sup>922</sup> *titikṣasva* is an impv. middle desiderative 2ps of *√tij*. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 64. It connotes a desire to act.

<sup>923</sup> See Monier-Williams, 446. Its semantic ranger includes the desiderative *titikṣahe* in the *Udyoga Parvan*; *titikṣaat* in the *Bhīṣma Parvan*; the infinitive ‘to become sharp’ in the *Rig Veda* 1.55.1. In general, ‘to desire to become sharp of firm, to bear with firmness, suffer with courage or patience, endure.’ See *Rig Veda* 2.13. 3 and ‘to sharpen,’ *Rig Veda* 4.23.7 ([www.sanskritdictionary.com](http://www.sanskritdictionary.com)).

sharpens iron,’ or ‘practice makes perfect.’ If Arjuna sharpens his discipline of remaining indifferent to the exterior experiences of *karmanighora*, he may more successfully endure the traumatic impact upon his integrated interior life.

Furthermore, the sense of “sharpen” can imply a history and a reminder to approach combat through a rightly ordered, disciplined warcraft. Hence, Arjuna is to “endure” his sorrow with the patient maturity characteristic of his renowned status as a seasoned veteran. He is to endure the nonphysical traumas because he has seen Kṛṣṇa’s *rūpamaiśvara*. Still, more importantly, he has seen Kṛṣṇa’s “human, four-armed form” (*mānuṣaṃ, rūpeṇa caturbhujena*) endowed with all of the grandness of the “Cosmic/Princely Form” (*rūpamaiśvaram*, cf. Ch. 7.1.2-7.1.3).

*Titikṣasva* also carries a sense of patient suffering not always emphasized. Tsoukalas translates the imperative as “you must desire to endure,” which implies that the desire to endure requires mental discipline, an act of Arjuna’s willpower. For example, Arjuna demonstrated his willingness to be corrected/re-ordered when he sat before Kṛṣṇa and requested *śādhi*. The fundamental desire to overcome the *guṇas* precedes all of the forthcoming theologically substantiated epistemology.<sup>924</sup> In other words, Arjuna received Kṛṣṇa’s teaching because he desired to overcome his misperception and reasoning. Failing to expect, endure, and willfully respond appropriately to the fleeting emotions (compared to the permanent eternality of the *ātman*) may result in a loss of experiencing the transformational knowledge accompanying the command *viddhi* (*Bg* 2.17). The placement of a contemplative aspect shows that Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna’s immediate and practical concerns and *then* offers an ontology that predicates his epistemology and

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<sup>924</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 1, 139. Tsoukalas references the commentary by Douglas Hill who reminds the reader that to endure is to fulfill a fundamental requirement for knowledge amongst the major interpretative traditions (the *Vedānta* systems)

Arjuna’s co-mission. It is possible that if Arjuna does not want to change, then he changes not. Thus, there is a conditional dynamic to *śādhi*.

Tragically, common combat trauma will continue to plague Arjuna to his death. As McGrath reflects, no other *kṣatriya* (semi-divine or not) experiences the range of sorrow and wrath save Karna.<sup>925</sup> As Arjuna’s warrior stage of life ends, his presentation as the “perfect warrior” in the war books “most vividly and actively represent his extraordinary martial abilities and his emotional range.”<sup>926</sup> As an ideal, Arjuna fails miserably. However, his struggles with *dharma*, commitment, and ability to hear and respond to Kṛṣṇa (others) in those dire moments make him the model for all others who experience nonphysical trauma in combat and desire to overcome the daily grind long after their war. But, even as a model, he will eventually die because of his severe grief from the war. His profound expressions make it possible for others to find relief, so McGrath writes, “The verbal conventions bring order and signification to what might otherwise become a possible disordering and violent mood.”<sup>927</sup> I suggest it is in this type of model that Arjuna is the perfect *kṣatriya*.

### 6.2.3 Kṛṣṇa Meets Arjuna Where He Is

At that time, Kṛṣṇa’s first objective was Arjuna’s felt need (grief). Addressing his grief reinforces Kṛṣṇa’s kind, graceful, and loving intention to re-order his friend. Arjuna was always aware of his relationship with Kṛṣṇa. He later confessed that his embarrassing *a-dharma* actions were the result of a misguided expression of his firmly held love (*praṇayena*, Bg 11.41), formed

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<sup>925</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 72.

<sup>926</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 71

<sup>927</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 61.

through their unique friendship spanning the ages (*cf.* Ch. 1.5). Tsoukalas comments that v41 implies a confession on Arjuna’s part regarding how he has *now* realized how he *prior* assumed a “teaching authority” over Kṛṣṇa.<sup>928</sup> Returning to *Bg* 2.4-8, feeling confident in his perception (and reasoning), Arjuna follows up with a retort to Kṛṣṇa’s first rebuke. However, I do not read Arjuna’s words negatively, i.e., a heated apologetic. He is not attacking Kṛṣṇa though resisting one’s *dharma* is resisting Kṛṣṇa’s purposes. Nor is Arjuna entirely incapacitated. The impact of Kṛṣṇa’s “powerful words” in *Bg* 2.1-3 began Arjuna’s return to combat readiness; thus, Ranganathananda explains how Arjuna gradually became “coherent.”<sup>929</sup> I disagree with Ranganathananda if he means Kṛṣṇa “removed” Arjuna’s affliction in the past perfect tense, that Arjuna can at that moment completely “control his feelings and emotions.”<sup>930</sup> Instead, I understand *Bg* 2.4-8 as the first sign of Arjuna’s turnaround.

In addition, Arjuna was well-known as a great orator. Therefore a powerful thrust like the “speech acts” of other heroes would be expected in such a crucial moment in one’s life.<sup>931</sup> Arjuna’s oratory prowess may be the reason why Kṛṣṇa forcefully conveys his convictions (*matas*) through the repetition of *tasmāt* (“therefore”), especially when preceding imperatives (*cf.* Ch. 8.5). In addition, on several occasions in the heat of battle, Arjuna rightly corrects Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa’s pre-war commitment. Of course, one would expect an authoritative tone in the heat of battle.

The fact that Kṛṣṇa deals first with the emotional dimension of combat displays compassion, empathy, and practicality. The *Mhba* repeatedly portrays warriors who cannot endure their fleeting emotions, especially anger and grief. They fight and die bravely, but they often deeply

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<sup>928</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 4, 275. He references *Bg* 1.36-37, 45-47. *Praṇayena* s m. inst. sg.

<sup>929</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Messgae of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1, 97.

<sup>930</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Messgae of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 1, 97.

<sup>931</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 11.

struggle to check their feelings to become indifferent. For example, at the sight of the slaying of two great Kuru *kṣatriyas* (Srutayos, Achyutayos), men reacted as if they had seen the oceans dry up before their eyes.<sup>932</sup> Inexperienced *kṣatriyas* could not experientially know war’s harsh realities. Still, veteran *kṣatriyas* in that host would have been conditioned and desensitized to death and carnage, even when they see great warriors fall in combat.<sup>933</sup> If so, they would have steeled themselves for the worst by mentally preparing to manage their emotions. However, time and again, the *Mhba* portrays a breakdown of mental and emotional discipline. *Kṣatriyas* intend to endure the fleeting traumas of *karmanīghora* but eventually succumb to the assault. Thus, the *Mhba* is highlighting the reality-shaking magnitude of the emotional distress of combat. For example, when Jayadratha hears that Arjuna has sworn to slay him for the treacherous murder of his son (Abhīmanyu), he likens his sorrow and grief to sinking into the unmeasurable depths of the ocean.<sup>934</sup> In other words, he believed there was no end to the abyss in which his heart and life may fall.

We will discover that *titikṣasva* is extremely difficult to execute in the heat of battle. Kṛṣṇa is preparing Arjuna for the carnage to come by giving him a framework to avoid “throwing down his [uniquely] required [combat] actions,”<sup>935</sup> just like he threw down Gāṇḍīva. Doing so would be an act of “ignorant darkness” (*tamas guṇas*). Kṛṣṇa wants Arjuna to avoid the negative *guṇa* spiral that will cause him to “reject combat action out of fear of bodily harm” and “sorrow” or

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<sup>932</sup> Ganjuli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCII, 182. Bhīṣma refers to the the task before him as a “vast ocean,” See Ganguli, *Udyoga-Parvan*, CLXIX, 328.

<sup>933</sup> I infer this from the accounts of the war and the overarching theme of heroes and rank and file troops. But also, the example of Prince Uttara’s example of an inexperienced and unmanly *kṣatriya*. He obviously was a work in progress.

<sup>934</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXV, 143.

<sup>935</sup> See *Bg* 19.7, *niyatasya tu saṁnyāsaḥ karmaṇa*.

“difficulty.”<sup>936</sup> Doing so would be *rajasic*. At the heart of the imperative *titikṣasva* is the individual's desire to endure the powerful nonphysical traumas of *karmaṇighora*. It is difficult to imagine the horrific experiences of combat in any era (see *Bg* 4), and history has shown that these nonphysical wounds go with the veteran long after the war. Yet, Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi* requires “to bear with firmness, [to] suffer with courage or patience.”<sup>937</sup> Other less prominent commands work to modify *titikṣasva*.<sup>938</sup> I will now examine the imperatives *bhava* (become), *smara* (remember), and *śṛṇu* (hear).

#### 6.2.4 *Bhava*: “Be!”

A key to enduring *karmaṇighora* is becoming the devotee whom Kṛṣṇa commands. The imperative *bhava* (“be/become”) from the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$  is employed 9x,<sup>939</sup> seven of which pertain to

<sup>936</sup> See *Bg* 18.8, *kāyakleśabhayāt tyajet. Duḥkham* has the sense of difficulty and sorrow. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 44. This is the only occurrence of ablative masc compound. The ablative points to fear as the source of the emotional rejection of combat duty.

<sup>937</sup> See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 446.

<sup>938</sup> They also modify *viddhi*. Of lesser significance is the imperative *nibodha*, “learn,” from the root  $ni + \sqrt{budh}$ , implying certainty and appears 3x, two of which predicate major blocks of teaching in *Bg* 18.13-49, 50-71. The first occurrence in *Bg* 1.7 refers to Sañjaya's introduction of the Kuru heroes (v8-9). For the 2sg. impv. act. *nibodha* from  $ni \sqrt{budh}$ , see *Bg* 1: 7; 18:13, 50. The combination implies the sense of “knowing with certainty.” See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 80. Both imperatives have direct correlations to Arjuna's commitment and stem from his final “desire to know the truth” regarding how the roles of “renouncing” and “abandonment” function in his warcraft (*Bg* 18.1). See *tattvam icchāmi veditum*. His desire (*icchāmi*) is 1sg pr. indic. act from  $\sqrt{iṣ}$ , implying he want to know the truth of reality of which he must advance into battle. The tone of the chapter is that this question appears to be his final step toward the return of his pre-war commitment (*Bg* 18.73). The broader semantic range of  $\sqrt{budh}$  carries substantial *Mhbn* themes, such as the commonly applied response to *karmaṇighora*, “to recover consciousness after swooning” (see also the *Rig Veda*). Other senses are a “fully awakened man who has achieved perfect knowledge of the truth . . . liberated from all existence,” who shares the “method” of reaching the same state prior to his death and arrival in Nirvāna. See Williams, Monier Monier, 733. The latter is a common theme within Buddhism.

<sup>939</sup> See Williams, Monier Monier, 748. For the 2sg impv. act. *bhava* from  $\sqrt{bhū}$ , see Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 104 (*Bg* 2:45; 6:46; 8:27; 9:34; 11:33, 46; 12:10; 18:57, 65). For the 3sg impf *abhavat*, see *Bg* 1.13. For the 3sg pr. ind. act. *bhavati*, see *Bg* 1.40, 44.; 2.63; 4.7, 12; 6.2, 17, 42; 7.23; 8.19; 9.31; 14.3, 10, 21; 21.2, 3, 7, 12. For the 3sg pl. pr. ind. act *bhavanti*, see *Bg* 3.14; 8.18; 10.5; 14.4; 16.3, 9; see also for prefixes *abhi-* and *pra-*. For the n. nom. sg. *bhūtani*, see *Bg* 3.14. For the m. inst. pl *pravhavāis*, see *Bg* 18.17. For the 3sg dual pr. ind. act. *bhavatas*, see *Bg* 14.6. For the m. nom. sg. Tp Cpd *samubhavas*, see *Bg* 3.37. For the m. nom. sg with prefixes *sam + ud, pra-, ud-, sam-*, see *Bg* 3.14, 37; 7.6; 9.18; 10.34; 14.3. For all occurrences of the m. acc. sg., see *Bg* 3.15; 5.23; 10.2; 10.41. For the m. acc. sg. with prefix *ud-* combined with action and anger (see Chs. 10-11), *karmakṛdhabhavamvegam*, see *Bg* 5.23. For the m. nom. sg. TP cpd. *bhūtabhāvodbhavakaro*, see *Bg* 8.3. For the m.

the means of Arjuna’s co-mission. Two pertain to his ultimate expression of commitment. Therefore, Arjuna must remain resilient so that he may fully embrace Kṛṣṇa’s purpose, “Become the primary agent [for combat].”<sup>940</sup> Therefore, enduring *karmanighora* will be the constant challenge of executing *karmanighora* upon one’s enemies.

Regarding the means of enduring battle, he is to become a *kṣatriya* with the epistemological qualities, “*guṇa*-free,” “indifferent to opposites,” “void of preservation,” as one “standing in eternal truth” and “possessed [with the quality] of the *ātmavān*” (*Bg* 2.45).<sup>941</sup> This verse deals directly with the initial perception of his crisis. Arjuna refused to fight because he was sitting in the *guṇas* of passion and ignorant-darkness.<sup>942</sup>

What is ultimately at risk is the state of his worship. In *Bg* 9.34 and 18.65, we find identical verses except for the final clause, whereby *bhava* appears with the imperative *kuru*.<sup>943</sup> In both, we see the summative command for Arjuna’s interior life, which I interpret, places the worship of Kṛṣṇa at the center of his *dharma* co-mission.

Be me-fixated, me-devoted, me-sacrificing, Worship me! Disciplined in [your] yoga, you, your *ātmanām* [after the war] will surely come to me” (*Bg* 9.34)

In the latter verse,

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acc. sg. with the prefix *ud* + *√bhū*, *brahmodbravam*, see *Bg* 3.15. See also, Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 106.

<sup>940</sup> The agent of Kṛṣṇa’s punishment (*nimittamātraṃ bhava*). The impv. *bhava* is paired with the noun *nimitta* which I read as an instrumental of agency.

<sup>941</sup> I read the m. nom. sg. with the sense of the quality of the inherent nature that inhabits his *prkṛti* based on its position as the final term of the *śloka*. It is the ultimate qualitative reality that is to be known by men and women.

<sup>942</sup> See *Bg* 12.10. Kṛṣṇa appears to offer concessions. If Arjuna is unable to perform as those whom Kṛṣṇa deems greatest (v2-8), or “unable to mentally stand in combat-readiness in relationship with Kṛṣṇa,” nor able to “seek to be” with Kṛṣṇa through his specific *yoga* (v9), then he is commanded, at the least, to be one who directs to Kṛṣṇa his “intention” to fulfill his “work.” In v9, see *sthiram* for “mentally stand in combat-readiness;” which is syntactically related the *√sthā*, “stand.” See, *mayi*, for “in relationship to me,” which I read as a locative of reference. See *matkarmaparamo bhava* for “Be intent on my work.” His work is Kṛṣṇa’s work.

<sup>943</sup> *Bg* 9.34 ends with *yuktvaivam ātmānaṃ matparāyaṇas* . *Bg* 18.65 ends with *satyaṃ te pratijāne priyosi me* .

Be me-fixated, me-devoted, me-sacrificing, Worship me! You are dear to me. I promise [you]. You will really come to me [after the war]. (*Bg* 18.65).<sup>944</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's unique ontology substantiates disciplined, worship-centered warfare, and this type of combat becomes the *kṣatriya*'s expression of Kṛṣṇa's call to "be steadfast" (*Bg* 8:27). *Karmanīghora* pulls the *kṣatriya* away from the ultimate purpose of making one's warfare their mode of worship. As a result, Arjuna either gives up the ground and throws down his weapon (*Bg* 1.47), or he lets go of those grim experiences by seeing them as no different from one another (*Bg* 6.46; 18.57).<sup>945</sup> Yet, *Bg* 18.65 affirms that Kṛṣṇa seeks Arjuna (likewise humanity); Kṛṣṇa loves Arjuna (likewise humanity). Thus, Griffiths comments that *bhakti* leads to the end state, writing, "it is not merely that we love God, but that He loves us. That is what is revealed in the *Gita*."<sup>946</sup>

### 6.2.5 *Smara*: "Remember!"

The imperative *smara* from  $\sqrt{smṛi}$  is to engage memory function in the heat of battle. While the verb is not as common as others, it is a critical component of Kṛṣṇa's restorative *guṇa-karma* epistemology, for it is needed most in the killing act or at the moment of death.<sup>947</sup> Likewise, it is the target of attack by the *guṇas* when executing *karmanīghora*. In its broader usage,  $\sqrt{smṛi}$  carries

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<sup>944</sup> My translations of the mas. sg. cpd. reflects my emphasis to place Kṛṣṇa at the exclusive agent of one's informed worship. In doing this, I not only reflect the interior state of the *kṣatriya*'s combat-readiness, but also his ultimate expression of co-mission as worship. I will later reflect on why I emphasize the *yogas* as an inseparable cpd.—*jnanakarmabhakti*.

<sup>945</sup> Arjuna, like any other *kṣatriya*, is to frame the entirety of his actions on the battlefield (*yat karosi*) as an act of worship to Kṛṣṇa (*Bg* 9:27). Arjuna is now morally prepared for his combat duty by the the 'top secret' of his commission (*guhyaḍ uhyataram*). Kṛṣṇa affords the opportunity to reflect and perform, commanding, "Thus, perform that which you desire" (*Bg* 18:63).

<sup>946</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 322.

<sup>947</sup> For the p. 3p. sg. *smarati*, see *Bg* 8.14. For the nom. sg. pass. participial adj. *smaran*, see *Bg* 3.6; 8.5, 6. For the nom. sg. n. p. pass. participial adj. *smṛtam*, see *Bg* 17.20, 21; 18.38. For the nom. sg. m. p. pass. participial adj. *smṛta*, see *Bg* 17.23. For the nom. sg. f. p. pass. ptc. adj. *smṛtā*, see *Bg* 6.19. For the abl. sg. of the m. cpd. noun *smṛtibhramśād*, see *Bg* 2.63. For the nom. sg. of the mas. cmp. noun *smṛtivibhramas*, see *Bg* 2.63. For the nom. sg. f. noun *smṛti*, see *Bg* 10.34; 15.15; 18.73. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 163-164. For the impv. *smara* in *Bg* 8.7, see also Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 3, 157.



the senses of “recollect,” “be mindful,” “to think of with sorrow and regret,” “to cause to remember” (*Mhba*).<sup>948</sup> As the noun (*smara*), we find the senses of “remembering,” “memory,” “recollection,” and “remembrance.” In the poem by Kālidāsa, *The Meghadūta*, the noun *smaradaṣā* is one of the ten states of the mind and carries the senses of “pensive reflection,” “indifference to external objects,” “abandonment of shame” “fainting as a result of death.”<sup>949</sup> In the genitive, *smaraṇa*, we find the “act of remembering,” “calling to mind” (*Mhba* & *Rāmāyaṇa*), a “memory” (*Bhīṣma Parvann*), “mental recitation,” and “calling upon the name of a god.”<sup>950</sup> The *Bharṭṛihari* uses *smaraṇapadavī* in the context of those who are dead, a “road of (mere) memory.”<sup>951</sup>

Part of patiently enduring the negative impact of *karmaṇighora* is perpetually remembering Kṛṣṇa in every moment of combat, especially at the final moment of death. I will now use one example to illustrate the importance of “remembering” as it functions in battle. *Bg* 8.5-7 is the expansion of Kṛṣṇa’s explanation of the nature of reality in combat (v3-4), and the repetition of *smara* connects them.<sup>952</sup> There is also a sense of conditionality.<sup>953</sup> In *Bg* 8.7, Kṛṣṇa employs the imperative active form (*anusmara*) to the moment one is killed in action, “Therefore, remember me at all times while you fight. Having a mind and intelligence fixed firmly on me, you will certainly come to me [*when you die*].”<sup>954</sup> Kṛṣṇa is continuing his discussion from v5,

<sup>948</sup> See Williams, Monier Monier, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1271.

<sup>949</sup> See Williams, Monier Monier, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1272.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

<sup>951</sup> Ibid.

<sup>952</sup> *Anusmara* in v7. Each sloka builds upon one another.

<sup>953</sup> Going to Kṛṣṇa is based upon the object of Arjuna’s focus, hence “whatever” (*yaṃ yaṃ*) and the two contradicting destinations in v5-7.

<sup>954</sup> *tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca*. I prefer the translation of “remember,” for its sense of immediacy over “meditate” (Sargeant). See also Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 3, “remember,” with the option of “recollect.” However, in a different context, such as his training with Droṇa, or in general, peace-time, I would opt for meditation for its implication as a discipline that must be mastered for combat. No doubt, this act is predicated by his ontology in *Bg* 7. The final destination of a being is ultimately not by the human action in combat, but the relationship of that person to Kṛṣṇa. I translate *sarveṣu kāleṣu* as a locative of time (when or while).

“Constantly remembering me at the time of death, giving up the body ...” The present participle, *smaran*, has an active force. Thus, the act of remembering Kṛṣṇa must be a willful, constant, determined decision despite the level of the impact of *karmanighora*, despite how one’s heart feels. His destiny hangs in the balance of that moment. His nonembodied destination will be determined by the focus of his “thinking” *at the moment* of death, having expended the temporal purpose of his material body (*prakṛti*).<sup>955</sup> Kṛṣṇa will “direct” him to that “state of being.”<sup>956</sup> Arjuna’s movement toward *mokṣa* is contingent upon his ability to bear up under the common nonphysical traumas assaulting his ability to perceive and “maintain a correct mental attitude,” continually focused upon Kṛṣṇa.<sup>957</sup> As we have discussed before, the *ātman* is inviolate. What is at stake is whether Arjuna will go to Kṛṣṇa or return through re-birth.

As the “greatest one” (*śreṣṭhas*) at Kurukṣetra,<sup>958</sup> Arjuna has a responsibility to others. Fowler comments that in *Bg* 3.21, Kṛṣṇa is “hinting that *he* should be an example to the people.”<sup>959</sup> I interpret v21 in the following sense: *kṣatriyas* will look to fight and respond the same way Arjuna responds to the *guṇas* assaulting his ability to see and endure the common emotions and nonphysical combat traumas. Arjuna is universally known as the greatest of all *kṣatriyas*. All other *kṣatriyas* will model themselves based on whatever defining model he provides.

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<sup>955</sup> See *Bg* 8.5-6. I concur with Tsoukalas who emphasizes the exact moment of death that one goes “precisely” (*eva*) to that object/state of focus. See Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgīta*, vol. 3, 154. *Smara* in v5 is a pre. act. part., hence, whatever a *kṣatriya* may be thinking of at the moment of death. and *Anusmara* in v6 is a pres. act. impv.

<sup>956</sup> For my choice of Arjuna being directed to the focus of his mind, see Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 3, 156-157. The immediate context is Kṛṣṇa’s explanation of the moment one is killed in combat (v5-7), but the context of the chapter is his response to Arjuna’s request to explain the terms *Brahman*, *karma* (action) *adhyātman*, *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva*, and *adhiyajñas* (v1-2). Kṛṣṇa gives a brief answer in vv3-4. *Brahman* is *akṣaram brahma paramam*, “indestructible, supreme, eternal.” As in other cases, I interpret a term by using multiple options, for there are multiple options. The *Brahman* is eternal and it cannot be killed. Since the context is about the moment one is killed in battle, I also infer “immortal.” There is no weapon that can pierce it (*Bg* 2.23-24). Karma is

<sup>957</sup> See Tsoukalas’ translation of *arpitamanobuddhis*. Kṛṣṇa is the agent of reference (*mām*), in *Bhagavadgītā*, vol 3, 156-157.

<sup>958</sup> In *Bg* 3.21, *śreṣṭhas* refers to the great king, Janaka in v20.

<sup>959</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 60. Emphasis hers.

By my choice of “defining model,” I mean the “standard” (*yat pramāṇam*). “Standard” is a typical rendering (see Sargeant, Zaehner, Fowler),<sup>960</sup> or there is the option of a “scale” by which others may measure themselves (Tsoukalas).<sup>961</sup> Strohmeier translates Gandhi and opts for “example.”<sup>962</sup> Men who may be struggling with the nonphysical traumas of combat will look to their human superiors for an example by which to measure themselves. If Arjuna struggles to endure the day-to-day stresses, the emotions, and the traumas, then, as a model, he appears to be a great man of imperfect *dharma* who works at being all that *dharma* requires him to be.

### 6.2.6 Śṛṇu: “Hear!”

The function of remembering is similar to the imperative, “hear!” (*śṛṇu*), appearing 13x, six of which appear in *Bg* 18.<sup>963</sup> When the waves of the *guṇas* crash upon his mental and emotional state of being, Kṛṣṇa invites Arjuna to remember and then act upon what he heard in Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī*. He is to be a model of a “learned devotee” (*śuśruvas*, *Rig Veda*).<sup>964</sup> Arjuna is to apply Kṛṣṇa’s orally transmitted sacred teaching (*śruta*, *Bg* 2.29).<sup>965</sup> The faculty of hearing is the auditory means

<sup>960</sup> See Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 178; Zahener, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 55; Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 60. So also, Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, 160.

<sup>961</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 353.

<sup>962</sup> Strohmeier, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita: According to Gandhi*, 42

<sup>963</sup> *Śṛṇu* carries the semantic range of listen, hear or learn anything about or from anyone. In the *Mhba*, to hear is in reference to a teacher, to study, to be attentive, to be obedient (William, Monier-Monier, 1100-1101). For the impv. *śṛṇu* from √*śru*, see *Bg* 2.39; 7.1; 10.1; 13.4; 16.6; 17.2; 17.7; 18.4; 18.19; 18.29; 18.36; 18.45; 18.64; and the optative with imperatival force, 18.71. For the n. nom sg. p. pass. ptc *śrutam*, see *Bg* 18.72. ptc. For the 3p sg. pr. ind act. *śṛṇoti*, see *Bg* 2.29; 13.25. For the m. n. sg. *anasūyaś*, *Bg* 18.71. For the 3p sg. opt. act. *śṛṇuyād*, see *Bg* 18.71, which Whitney reminds us carries the force of an imperative with little difference in meaning or magnitude of the desire of the communicator to the communicant (Whitney, 574). For the nom. pl. of the mas. Or the comp. adj. *śrutvānyebhya*, “hear from others,” see *Bg* 13.25. For the n. nom. sg. p. pass. ptc. *chrutam*, see *Bg* 18.72. For acc. sg. of n. p. pass. adj. *chrutam*, see *Bg* 18.72. For the nom. sg. *chrutam* of the p. pass ptc adj, see *Bg* 18.75. For the acc. dual *śrutau*, see *Bg* . 11.2. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 16, 145. The repetition of the command in *Bg* 18 reinforces the summative nature of the chapter.

<sup>964</sup> For, *śuśruvas*, see Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1100-1101.

<sup>965</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on the *ātman*.

to rightly perceiving and obeying Kṛṣṇa, but closely associated with that function is the role of faith (*śraddhāvan*, *Bg* 18.71). To hear and understand is equivalent to rightly seeing and knowing. Faith and hearing are a significant association in the coming days since sanctioned combat will often become a downward spiral to unrighteous killing, even into what we may now refer to as war crimes.

Near the conclusion of the poem in *Bg* 18.69-71, Kṛṣṇa promises “liberation” (*muktas*) to those who “should hear” (*śṛṇuyāt*) the “sacred dialogue” (v69) “with faith” (*śraddhāvān*,v71).<sup>966</sup> In *Bg* 18.72, Kṛṣṇa’s final words are, “has *this* [*Bg* 2.10-18.71] been heard by you?”<sup>967</sup> The faculty of hearing is the final test of whether Arjuna is indeed re-ordered, hence his last question is if Arjuna’s “ignorant-confusion” (*ajñāna-saṃmohas*) had already been “conquered” (*pranaṣtas*) through a “singularly focused mental-concentration” (*ekāgreṇa cetasā*). Arjuna’s positive response in v73 was that it was no longer present *because of* the process of stopping, dropping, and approaching Kṛṣṇa for correction (*śādhi*).

### 6.3 *Viddhi*: “Know!” [how the warrior endures *karmanṅhore*]

The imperative is employed 24x,<sup>968</sup> the present indicative 11x,<sup>969</sup> and the indicative past participle (gerund) 2x.<sup>970</sup> Kṛṣṇa fuses the former command, *titikṣasva* (*Bg* 2.11-14), with the latter,

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<sup>966</sup> See v70, *dharmyam saṃvādam*.

<sup>967</sup> The immediate antecedent is the powerful summary of the *Bg* 18.65-66. However, It is all of the *Bg*, for Kṛṣṇa refers to the entire “sacred dialogue” in v70.

<sup>968</sup> Divanji, Prahlad C., *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 133. See 2:17; 3:15, 32, 37; 4:13, 32, 34; 6:2; 7:5, 10, 12; 10:24, 27; 13:2, 19(2x), 26, 14:7 8, 15:12; 17:6, 12; 18:20, 21. See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 963.

<sup>969</sup> See *Bg* 2.19; 4.9; 6.21; 7.3; 10.3, 7; 13.2; 13.24; 14.19; 18.21, 30. Interestingly, Divanji does not include the present indicative.

<sup>970</sup> *viditva*, Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 133. See *Bg* 2.25; 8.28. In *Bg* 2.25, we find combined with the accusative “this,” implying the preceding teaching of the transcendent, embodied, immutable ātman body is specific knowledge (v19-24), which continues from v16-17 further building upon the theological predication of

*viddhi* (v15-17). Consequently, the combination of “patiently enduring” and “knowing” is very practical warcraft for managing the day-to-day experiences of *karmaṅghora* (*yudhyasva*, v18). Most importantly, *knowing* Kṛṣṇa’s ontological nature (his own and the nature of combat) while seeing (perceiving and understanding) the “violent, gory combat” (*karmaṅghora*) is the fundamental means by which a *kṣatriya* prepares, fulfills *dharma*, and bears the toll of war. Kṛṣṇa’s goal for Arjuna is to become a *vidvān* (*Bg* 3.25, 26), an informed *kṣatriya*, wisely enjoying battle in disciplined warcraft, unlike those who are held back by the domination of the *guṇas* compelling them to focus upon the phenomenology of war.<sup>971</sup>

As discussed before in section 6.2, Kṛṣṇa commands Arjuna to “patiently endure” the “bodily sensations” (*mātrāsparsās*, *Bg* 2.14). But the ontological reason is that the human soul shares eternity with Kṛṣṇa. War destroys the body; the soul moves on in the process of death/rebirth (v12-13). He is a seasoned veteran who should not allow those common emotions to “cause him to tremble” (*na vyathayanti*, v15) before, in, or after combat.<sup>972</sup> As we recall from *Bg* 1.29, Arjuna described himself as “trembling” (*vepathus*, *Bg* 1.29), “having seen” and allowing his filial sentimentality to cause himself to misperceive his enemy targets as “my own people” (*dr̥ṣṭvemaṃ svajanam*). In v29, he described himself as the opposite of a “most devoted” (“most disciplined”), “indifferent, anxiety-free” (*udāsīno gatavyathaḥ*) devotee.<sup>973</sup> In addition, in *Bg* 14.2, he was the opposite of the *munayas* (“wise men”) who, “having known the superlative knowledge” (*Bg* 14.1),<sup>974</sup> did not “tremble at the dissolution of the universe” (*vyathanti*, v2). The

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enduring and knowing in battle. This teaching further substantiates the intended state of combat-readiness as one who does not continually mourn repeated in v25, 26, 27.

<sup>971</sup> This sentence is a paraphrase of *Bg* 3.26, focusing on the two clauses, *joṣayet sarvakarmāṇi vidvān yuktaḥ samācāran*, and *ajñānām karmasamginām*.

<sup>972</sup> *Na vyathayanty ete puruṣaṃ*, “these do not cause him to tremble.”

<sup>973</sup> For “most devoted/disciplined devotee,” see v2, *yuktatamā matās*. See v2-15 as a description of the most devoted devotee.

<sup>974</sup> For “superlative knowledge,” see *jñānam uttamam yaj jñātvā*; for “tremble at the dissolution of the universe,” see *pralaye na vyathanti*.

meaning of the imperative *viddhi* (*Bg* 2.17) compliments his patient endurance as he advances to fulfill the command to “fight” (*yudhyasva*, v18). Arjuna is to be “perpetually thinking” (*vetti*, *Bg* 2.19) upon the ontology of v16-18.<sup>975</sup>

### 6.3.1 An Acquaintance with War

The verb  $\sqrt{vid}$  is not strictly limited to the sense “to know.” Its broader semantic range carries the meaning of a patient, mature endurance characteristic of a veteran.<sup>976</sup> Another dimension of the verb in this context is “to become acquainted [with war].”<sup>977</sup> The *kṣatriya* who adapts and overcomes is the one who views with indifference all sensations in war (*samaduhkhasukham*, v15).<sup>978</sup>

However, acting upon such wisdom appears more challenging to remember when the killing begins. For example, the power of the *guṇas* seems to quickly sway great heroes despite the assumption that the participants engage each other as those who *know* that bodily death and destruction of their material bodies only *appear* to be the final reality. For example, in a scene from the *Droṇa Parvan*, Ghaṭōtkaca decapitates his opponent, Alumbusha, tossing his bloody head into the chariot of Duryodhana.<sup>979</sup> Ghaṭōtkaca intends his gesture to be a psychological blow to his audience’s disciplined warcraft, all of whom are the most highly skilled and experienced Kuru fighters. It was a taunt, a ploy to cause the prince to become attached to the results of the shock tactic, and it worked brilliantly. *Kṣatriyas* were stunned and responded far from treating

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<sup>975</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s employment of the present indicative implies the stance of continual combat-readiness, hence, my choice of, “he advances onward to battle.”

<sup>976</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 963. The verb  $\sqrt{vid}$  has the sense of to know, understand, perceive, to become or be acquainted with, have a correct notion of.

<sup>977</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 963.

<sup>978</sup> A *samānaduhkha* is a person shares in the same grief with another; sympathizes.

<sup>979</sup> Ganjuli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXIV, 402.

Alumbusha's death as *same*—the same as if he had survived and tossed Ghaṭōtkaca's head before Duryodhana (*same* vs. *a-same*). Patiently enduring such traumas and knowing the ontological/theological nature of combat and the reality of war is a long acquaintance in the same direction,<sup>980</sup> an acquaintance that includes the accumulation of the experiences of war (and the lessons learned) from countless prior engagements.

### 6.3.2 Manu's Discipline of "spiritual truth"

Monier-Williams refers to the "science of the soul" and "spiritual truth" (*ātmavidyā*),<sup>981</sup> referencing *Manu* 7.43 in the context of an established *kṣatriya* discipline.<sup>982</sup> In its context, Manu lists and compares the morning, afternoon, and evening activities that cultivate a wise *kṣatriya* in contrast to those who are unwise through a lack of discipline. For example, in the war, the *Mhba* accounts for Arjuna completing his morning devotions to Kṛṣṇa. Manu's contrast indicates that even disciplined but unwise kings living "in the forest" will be allowed to reacquire their kingdoms. Olivelle concludes that Manu is referencing the Pāṇḍu's exile.<sup>983</sup>

The disciplined *kṣatriya* will "strive vigorously to subdue his [sense] organs," which by doing so, he may rule over his kingdom [or engage in combat]. Listed are the immoral habits leading to grief, those that arise from pleasure, and those from wrath. Manu teaches that greed is the root of all three, and though the emotions of happiness will separate the king from "law and wealth," the "addiction" from those emotions originating in the *guṇas* of wrath will lead him to premature death. When Manu references vices like greed and anger, Manu's teaching applies to

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<sup>980</sup> Borrowed from Eugene Peterson's title, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (IVP).

<sup>981</sup> See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 963.

<sup>982</sup> Olivelle, Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 108-109.

<sup>983</sup> Olivelle credits Albrecht Wezler who notes that commentators often assume Manu is referencing the poor. Pertinent to Arjuna's commitment, he follows with a second contrast between the disciplined and undisciplined *kṣatriya*.

the traumatic emotions from anyone’s combat experiences. Manu may, again, be making a second reference to the *Mhba*, for the latter characterizes Duryodhana.<sup>984</sup> Implied by Manu is a strong *mokṣa* warning to the undisciplined kings/*kṣatriyas* who will suffer in re-birth from their *a-dharma*.<sup>985</sup> Regarding this section, all *kṣatriyas* were well schooled and knew combat etiquette.

From the broader lexical range of *√vid* outside the *Bg*, I infer that Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* will restore Arjuna to one who “cultivates” his life as one who “engages in study” (*vidyānusevin*). As Manu ordained, his warcraft reflects the warrior-scholar who applies his “pursuit of learning” (*vidyābhāysa*). In this way, he characterizes one who has “acquired learning” (*vidyālābha*), one who is “possessing knowledge (*vidyāvat*), a *kṣatriya* who pleases the “Lord of Science” (*vidyāmaheṣara*).<sup>986</sup> As demonstrated, this is no easy yoke to bear, but Kṛṣṇa assumes it is possible by categorizing all *karmaṇighora* as *same*, even if it is an ideal in the *Kali Age*.

### 6.3.3 *Same vs. Asame*

The term *sama(e)* is translated by others as “same,”<sup>987</sup> “alike,”<sup>988</sup> “evenminded,”<sup>989</sup> “calm,”<sup>990</sup> “beyond,”<sup>991</sup> “one,”<sup>992</sup> and “come and go.”<sup>993</sup> In the *Mhba* and Manu, it carries the sense of “common,” “ordinary,” and “level.”<sup>994</sup> In *Bg* 2.15, 38-49, Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to perceive

<sup>984</sup> Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 109. Manu implies a soteriological warning referencing 6.35.

<sup>985</sup> *Kṣatriya*’s are the ruling caste. Hence, their great responsibility to all other castes.

<sup>986</sup> Mahadheva is Sthānu-Kṛṣṇa. See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 963-964, for their locations in the *Mhba*.

<sup>987</sup> Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 100; Warriar, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 32; Fowler, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 25; Majumdar, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 65.

<sup>988</sup> Tsoukalas provides list of relevant senses, *Bhagavadgītā*, 140.

<sup>989</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, v1., 203.

<sup>990</sup> Sreekrishna and Ravikumar, *The New Bhagavad-Gīta*, 63.

<sup>991</sup> Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, 14.

<sup>992</sup> Flood and Martin, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 14.

<sup>993</sup> Easwaren, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 90.

<sup>994</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1152.



pain, loss, gain, victory, and defeat as indifferent. In this instance, Kṛṣṇa teaches that to “yoke [himself] to combat” (*yuddhāya yujyasva*) was the means to avoid “grasping [for] future evil” (*naivam pāpam avāpsyasi*).<sup>995</sup>

The future middle imperative of √*yuj* implies that viewing all phenomena as *same* must be Arjuna’s intention. Kṛṣṇa cannot do this for Arjuna. He must desire same-ness in all facets of combat. However difficult it may be, the adapted or conditioned warrior who perceives his emotional reactions as *same*, who is *samaduḥkhasukham*, immediately knows that this is not the actual end.<sup>996</sup> For example, Alumbusha will not eternally perish, for the immutable *ātman* will acquire another material body (if not liberated).<sup>997</sup> Scenes like this are merely aspects of his journey to *mokṣa*. Arjuna knows that the horizon of his future is fused with the grim phenomenological present. Learning, adapting, and managing transient experiences while knowingly embracing what is eternal and imperishable substantiates the command to fight (*Bg* 2.18). Seeing all traumas as “common” (*same*) and not different is merely the guṇic ebb and flow of war.

### 6.3.4 Knowing the Warpath, the Battlefield, and the Lord of Battle

The theme of utter devotion continues in *Bg* 13 through the concept of the “true knowledge” (v2, 11) of both “the [battle] Field” (*ksetram*) and the “Field Knower” (*Ksetrajnas*) in “unswerving devotion” (v2, 7-11).<sup>998</sup> Kṛṣṇa employs the imperative *viddhi* in v2, v19 (x2), and

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<sup>995</sup> The impv. mid. *yujyasva* is used 2x by Kṛṣṇa in *Bg* 2.38, 50, with v38 the only occurrence directly related to combat. The dative *yuddhāya* is only found in *Bg* 2.37, 38, with the dative *kṛtaniścayaḥ*, “resolved in battle.” *Sama* in the acc. BV compound, *samaduḥkhasukham*, literally means “same-pain-pleasure.” With the dative of reference (*somṛtatvāya*), it is the condition of the man who is “preparing himself *in reference* to eternity, (*somṛtatvāya kalpate*).

<sup>996</sup> I infer the sense of adapted to combat from *samaduḥkhasukham* because the examples from greater context of the war implies the inability to do so. Therefore, to be a is to learn and grow from each combat-experience.

<sup>997</sup> *Mokṣa* would be the assumption of Alumbusha’s death.

<sup>998</sup> Kṛṣṇa is the Field Knower.

v26. The theme of “knowing” (*jnatva*, v12) and “not knowing” (*ajanantas*, v25) constantly remain at the forefront of Kṛṣṇa’s *mokṣic* agenda. The distinction between Field and Knower is “considered” (*matam*) by Kṛṣṇa as true *jnana* (v2).<sup>999</sup> Kṛṣṇa explains a deeper level of ontology in v12-17, but I will focus on Kṛṣṇa as the “light of lights . . . seated in the hearts of all,” the indwelling, embodied *Ātman* (v17). As a devotee, Arjuna must “comprehend” (*vijnaya*) the field of battle and the instrumental nature of the supreme, indwelling *Ātman* so that he may “approach,” or “enter,” or “arrive” at Kṛṣṇa’s “state of being” (*madbhavaya*).

The inner desire to refuse battle service derives from the *guṇas* originating from the material nature of his body, becoming instruments that drive his actions. Standing in authority over the instrumental nature of this cyclic relationship of human *ātman* and material nature is the greater *Ātman*, or “Supreme Self” (*paramātmā*), residing indifferently and distinct as the authoritative “Witness,” “Consenter,” “Supporter,” “Experiencer,” and “Great Lord” (v22). Therefore, standing, fighting, and killing is a disciplined and refined knowledge of the battlefield and the *ātman*. It must be controlled in the *guṇic* ebb and flow before, in, and after combat.<sup>1000</sup>

The final imperative to “know” is paralleled with the one who simultaneously “sees” (13:27) the synergism between human *ātman* and material nature and the unity and like-nature of all human *ātmans*. This *kṣatriya* “truly sees” (v27, 29). Thus, *Bg* 13 conveys a deeper anthropological discussion on why the sword neither slays nor truly harms its opponents at the moment of bodily death. Arjuna (as an embodied *ātman*) must regain an informed combat ready devotion to Kṛṣṇa (v27-28; *cf.* 3.8). The relationship of the *ātman/Ātman* is a light on the battlefield

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<sup>999</sup> Kṛṣṇa’s *matam* in *Bg* 13 substantiates Kṛṣṇa’s *matā* in *Bg* 3.1, 8.

<sup>1000</sup> Perhaps, a better metaphor is the ‘tug-of-war’ of the *guṇas* and Arjuna’s *ātman* under the lordship of Kṛṣṇa’s *Ātman*.

for those carried away by the (eternal) ebb and flow of the *guṇas* originating within a war-torn material body, much like the “sun” that “illuminates the entire world” (v33).

### 6.3.5 The Universal Cosmic Tree

In *Bg* 14, the light on the battlefield is a decisive step toward physical conquest once the path toward inner mastery of the *guṇic* nature is expounded. The *guṇas* “bind down” or “ensnare” the *ātman* “in the body” (*dehe*, *Bg* 14:5). *Sattva*, the truth *guṇa*, “binds” (*hadhnati*) the *ātman* “by attachment to virtue” (*sukhasangena*) and “by attachment to knowledge” (*jnanasangenato*, v6). Had Arjuna perceived and made a rightly reasoned response to *sattva*, there would have been no need for a parlay with Kṛṣṇa. However, knowing Arjuna’s deficiencies, Kṛṣṇa commands him to “know” (*viddhi*) the nature of *rajas* and *tamas guṇas* (passion and ignorant darkness). *Rajas* or passion “binds down” (ensnares) the *kṣatriya-ātman* in the body to “attachment to action.” In other words, the loss of emotional control, the inability to be indifferent to one’s desires, and the avoidance of neutrality in the face of friend and foe produce a powerfully ensnaring impact upon Arjuna’s *ātman*. Likewise, the domination of “ignorant darkness” (*tamas*) leads to confusion and the negative *karma* associated with being entangled in “negligence, indolence, and sleepiness” (v7-8).

The call of *Bg* 14 is to “unswerving devotion” (*bhaktiyoga*, v22-27) in light of the superiority of a *sattvic* path (v10-20) which corresponds with marks of *sattvic* transcendence (v12). What is he to know? First, act according to *sattva* and be joined with virtue and knowledge. Second, act according to *rajas* and *tamas* and be held back and ensnared “in the body” to negative actions and ignorance. The former path will fulfill his pre-war commitment (eventually *mokṣa*). The latter disrupts/prevents his successful completion and Kṛṣṇa’s ultimate purposes. The

implication for all *kṣatriyas* is that ‘god’ is not fooled by extreme austerities and extra-scriptural acts of worship joined with hypocrisy. Arjuna is to “know” such works as tamasic (v6). He will know if the knowledge informing his perception of the battlefield is sattvic or potentially rajasic, tamasic, or both (*Bg* 18:21).

## Summary

In this chapter, I examined three key imperatives that form Kṛṣṇa’s *guṇa-karma* epistemology: *paśya*, *titikṣasva*, and *viddhi*. To ‘see’ (*paśya*) the battlefield is to rightly perceive the nature of combat and the reality of war. To “patiently endure” (*titikṣasva*) is a relentless desire and determination to bear oneself up under the day-to-day swells of the *guṇas*, knowing they are merely fleeting emotions and traumas associated with *karmaṇighora*. To “know” is to understand that the human *ātman* is inviolate, but the material nature of the human body can be destroyed. Therefore, when one sees the body destroyed, it only appears to be the soul's destruction. The three imperatives correct Arjuna’s perception of reality and provide practical teaching for experiencing fighting, killing, and living life after war. I will now examine the imperative forms of *√sthā* as the remaining piece of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*. Arjuna’s “office” is to stand and fight (*adhikāras*, *Bg* 2.47).<sup>1001</sup> Right perception, sound reasoning, correct ontology, and a dogged tenacity to patiently endure and live with nonphysical traumas are the components of recovering from combat and preparing for future warfare. Embracing these components demands that Arjuna must stand and reengage the enemy, and by doing so, he will discover a deeper level of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*. In the following chapter, I will address the significance of standing in the face of foes and Kṛṣṇa standing with Arjuna.

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<sup>1001</sup> See *adhikāra* in Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 20.



## Chapter 7

### √*Sthā*: Stand: Arjuna’s Combat Response to Kṛṣṇa’s *Śādhi*

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* involved the meta-epistemic command to rightly “see” (perceive/understand) the nature of combat. The two imperatives, “patiently endure” and “know,” act as a practical response to the day-to-day challenges of nonphysical phenomena before, in, and after combat. The *Bg* places both in the context of Kṛṣṇa’s urging Arjuna not to mourn those he must kill (*Bg* 2.11, 30). When Arjuna rightly perceives the nature of combat, he remembers what he knows about the *ātman* and the body and can endure the temporal passions associated with fighting and killing. Both commands prepare the reader for the focus of the inclusio in v18, “Therefore, fight” (*Bg* 2.11-30).

Arjuna’s restoration to combat-readiness is not complete until he can reason his following *dharma* action and fulfill his commitment. A reordered Arjuna is an Arjuna who stands, fights, and kills. This chapter focuses on how the variants of the root word √*sthā* weave throughout the text. The primary aim of this chapter is an examination and understanding of the imperative form of √*sthā* (*uttiṣṭha*), “stand up,” and its significance to Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*. Yet, there is more to the importance of √*sthā* in the *Bg* than the root of an imperative.

Most of the variations divide into two associations. In one group, one finds *ślokas* describing the mental discipline required (of Arjuna) to fulfill his unique co-mission. In another group, one finds *ślokas* describing Kṛṣṇa’s ontology. For example, the *Bg* uses √*sthā* when describing forces strategically deployed for the war (*imevasthitā yuddhe*, *Bg* 1.33). In addition, it appears with Arjuna’s inability to remain mentally stable *while* in combat (*avasthātum*, *Bg* 1.30)

and with those who are “standing in their knowledge-informed yoga” *while* they are fighting (*jñānayogavyavasthitis*, *Bg* 16.1). Kṛṣṇa is the “being whom all beings stand,” (*yasyāntaḥsthāni bhūtāni*, *Bg* 8.22).

The high frequency is significant. When read independently, the variants appear to be examples of the commonly used root. However, read together like a collage, the variations of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  infuse the imperatives with missional and ontological meaning. First, I will explore the phonetic significance of the collage (7.1). Then I will give examples of how the variants are associated with Arjuna’s co-mission and ontology (7.2a, 7.2b). Then, I will examine the significance of the five occurrences of the imperative (“stand/up”), four of which follow the conjunctive adverb *tasmāt* (“therefore”).<sup>1002</sup> The adverb *tasmāt* occurs 25x, indicating a cause-and-effect relationship.<sup>1003</sup> Then I will briefly return to how the imperatives in the collage illustrate the pattern in the *Bg* and the *Mhba*: ontology precedes co-mission. Finally, I will connect the significance of the high-frequency use of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  with the identity and role of the god Sthānu.

### 7.1 The Mnemonic Pattern of $\sqrt{sthā}$

The many forms of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  form a coherent collage of meaning.<sup>1004</sup> They are intricately connected to the combat context of the dialogue and throughout the epic. Besides Atsuko Izawa’s word study, “*On the Usage of upa-stha in the Black Yajurveda-Samhitas*,” there is little attention

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<sup>1002</sup> The suffixed form of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  is used in *Bg* 6.19. See *yathā dīpo nivāstha*. See Ch 8.3-8.5.

<sup>1003</sup> See *Bg* 1.37; 2.18, 25, 27, 30, 37, 50, 68; 3.15, 19, 41; 4.15, 42; 5.19; 6.46; 8.7, 20, 27; 11.32, 44; 16.21, 24; 17.24; 18.69. As previously mentioned, the repetition of conclusions lends an authoritative force to the dialogue.

<sup>1004</sup> See *Bg* 1.11, 14, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33, 47; 2.2, 6, 24, 45, 48, 53, 54 (3x), 55, 56, 72 (2x); 3.20, 24; 4.8, 23, 42; 5.4, 5, 19 (2x), 20(2x); 6.7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 26, 26, 29, 31(2x), 33(2x); 7.18, 20; 8.12, 22, 28; 9.4(2x), 5(2x), 6(2x), 18; 10.11, 20, 25, 42; 11.7, 13, 15, 32, 36; 12.3, 9, 19; 13.7, 15, 17, 21, 27, 30, 31, 32; 14.18, 24; 15.7, 10, 11, 16; 16.1, 24; 17.6, 8(2x), 27; 18.62, 73. The impv. act. *uttiṣṭha* appears 4x in *Bg* 2.3, 37; 4.42; 11.33. The causative impv active *sthāpaya* in *Bg* 1.21.

to its use.<sup>1005</sup> However, a variant of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  appears at least 125x (18% of *ślokas*) throughout the dialogue in significant passages at critical places in the literary structure.<sup>1006</sup> One possible reason for little attention is that western Hindu scholars may not be singing the “Song of the Lord.” After all, it is a ‘dead’ language. But, in Hindu practice over history, high-frequency sounds would have been obvious to the next generation of *kṣatriyas* who would have gathered and carefully listened to the bards singing the *Bg* as a form of worship and post-combat recovery.<sup>1007</sup> High-frequency words spoken in public worship would have grown in their significance, and, logically, certain words/phrases/entire *ślokas* (especially Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*) would have become significant to individual audiences.

Returning to McGrath’s quote, I argue that there is a possibility that  $\sqrt{sthā}$  is an imbedded, mnemonic device. He writes, “As the audience visualizes the acoustic signals of the poetry, the transformation of sound into mental imagery which occurs at this moment is arguably the occasion and instant for such a purgation and cleansing of the pain and horror caused by the experience of violence and combat.”<sup>1008</sup> Recalling Thiselton, a “fusion of ideas” occurred when audiences “connected” the “acoustic signals” between the horizon of the epic and the horizon of their own combat experiences and traumas. Visualization ( $\sqrt{paś}$ ) via one’s memory ( $\sqrt{smr}$ ) would have led to the “purgation and cleansing of the pain and horror” of *karmanīghora* because the individual heard (*śṛṇu*) the epic among their band of brothers.

This type of experience is very similar to Shay’s observation when he re-read the *Iliad*. Shay comments that the critical factor in the healing of WW II veterans was that they trained

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<sup>1005</sup> Izawa, Atsuko, “On the Usage of *upa-stha* in the Black Yajurveda-Samhitas,” *Journal of Hindu and Buddhist Studies* 63, vol. 3 (March 2015): 1168-1173. DOI: 10.4259/IBK.63.3\_1168. (Accessed 8-28-2021). Izawa concludes that the combination of *upa-stha* is always connected to worship.

<sup>1006</sup> I also include suffixes.

<sup>1007</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 17.

<sup>1008</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 53.



together, deployed together, fought and died together, and then returned home together. Their return home lasted weeks, but those weeks became the means of creating a safe environment for the surviving wounded to share their stories. It became a ritual as old as the *Old Testament*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*.<sup>1009</sup> Shay concedes the healing and restoration of a warrior’s sense of “innocence” can not be recovered. However, veterans who trust others with their stories create a “narrative time” that fosters the recovery of other aspects of humanity. Shay writes,

Severe trauma explodes the cohesion of consciousness. When a survivor creates fully realized narrative that brings together the shattered knowledge of what happened, the emotions that were aroused by the meanings of the events, and the bodily sensations that the physical events created, the survivor pieces back together the fragmentation of consciousness that trauma has caused.<sup>1010</sup>

It is easy to imagine that psychologically and spiritually traumatized *kṣatriyas* heard Kṛṣṇa’s words to Arjuna (*śādhī*) and attempted to understand their nonphysical “pain and horror” as temporal, common, nonphysical traumatic sensations of the body that have no ultimate consequences to the soul (*ātman*). I now turn to the syntax and the meaning of the root verb.

## 7.2 General Occurrences of √*sthā*

The many different variances of √*sthā* lend to the possibility of an intentionally embedded mnemonic pattern which appears in 18% of the 700 *ślokas*. Secondly, inserting “stand/-ing” into the translation of many of the usages increases the connection for non-Sanskrit readers.<sup>1011</sup> In

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<sup>1009</sup> See Jonathon, *The Odysseus in America*, 244. Shay encourages the construction of safe spaces and social rituals that allow the warrior and home community to hear, heal, and move forward together.

<sup>1010</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 188 (184-192). Shay writes that “narrative time” is a transcendent, universal phenomenon.

<sup>1011</sup> See examples below.

addition, inserting ‘stand’ creates the mental image and symbolic metaphor of Arjuna’s decision to sit and Kṛṣṇa’s command to “stand up.”

Variations of √*sthā* rank highly with other significant terms/sounds dispersed throughout the *ślokas*, e.g., ***dharma*** (38x/4%), ***mukta-*** (29x/4%), ***mokṣa-*** (42x/6%), ***yoga-*** (128x/18%), ***kṛtvā-*** (180x/26%), and ***jñāna-*** (198x/28%). While other terms appear more frequently, there is a syntactic, linguistic, mnemonic, ontological, and theological connection with Sthānu in scenes where Arjuna struggles to manage and endure emotions/thoughts/feelings that are causing traumas *while in combat*. Furthermore, the *Bg* uses the same word to teach that the *ātman* who indwells his opponents “stands firmly” (***sthāṇus***, *Bg* 2.4), immutable to weapons (*śastrāṇi*, v23).

As a mnemonic device, Vyāsa intends the reader/listener to mentally organize the general meaning of each occurrence into a comprehensive, interpretative milieu. Read individually in or out of the combat context, the variants convey the sense of firmness, fixed, steadfastness, immovable, and standing. However, read as a *dharma*-charged collage, the highly repeated root infuses the four imperatives from Kṛṣṇa. The collage highlights the contrast of Arjuna’s wrongly reasoned decision to re-manuever his chariot (***sthāpaya***, *Bg* 1.21), the process of guṇic domination that caused him to sit the moment he was meant to shine (***rathopastha***, *Bg* 1.47), his declaration to obediently fulfill his pre-war promise (***sthitosmi***, *Bg* 18.73), and Arjuna’s capacity to reflect and seek understanding of his associations with Sthānu in the heat of the war. Likewise, when one reads (hears) the accounts of Sthānu and Arjuna in the *Mhba*, they may remember the collage and allow it to inform their reading of the broader epic.<sup>1012</sup> I will now examine the two major groupings of the many variations.

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<sup>1012</sup> Sthānu’s presence and actions mirror Kṛṣṇa presence and actions. Kṛṣṇa’s presence is always the ultimate *śādhi*.

### 7.3 Association with the Mental Discipline of Combat

The variations of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  are generally associated with Kṛṣṇa’s ontology and Arjuna’s mental discipline to stem the tide and ultimately defeat the thoughts (and emotions) which have caused his crisis. In the following two paragraphs, I will list examples of each as they appear in the dialogue. Space does not provide for every instance, but the reader is encouraged to find the complete lists in the corresponding footnote.

Regarding examples associated with the mental discipline of combat, I will focus on one instance where they are clustered near each other.<sup>1013</sup> Kṛṣṇa expects Arjuna to be totally “indifferent” to the pendulum swing of commonly experienced, polar emotions, i.e., joy/grief. Therefore, he must enter combat and fight as one “eternally standing in truth” (*nityasatvastha*, *Bg* 2.45).<sup>1014</sup> As such, he is to “execute combat-actions” as a *kṣatriya* “standing firmly in yoga” (*yogasthas kuru karmāṇi*, *Bg* 2.48). In *Bg* 2.54, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to describe a person who is “[standing] steady in insight” (*sthitaprajñasya*), who is “[standing] in meditation” (*samādhisthasya*), who is “[standing] stable in thought” (*sthitadhīḥ*). A wise *kṣatriya* is one whose “mind is not disturbed” when all goes wrong, who is “liberated from [temporal] desires” (*cf. Bg* 18.78), and whose “passion of fear and anger [associated with war] is not present.” That *kṣatriya*

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<sup>1013</sup> See *Bg* 1.27 (*avasthitān*), v30 (*avasthātum*), v47 (*rathopastha*); *Bg* 2.3 (*tyaktvottiṣṭha*), v37 (*tasmād uttiṣṭha*), v45 (*nityasatvasthas*), v48 (*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*), v53 (*sthāsyati*), v54 (*samādhisthasya*, *sthitaprajñasya*, *sthitadhīḥ*), v55 (*sthitaprajña*), v56 (*vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīḥ*), v57 (*prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*), v58 (*pratiṣṭhitā*), v61 (*pratiṣṭhitā*), v65 (*paryavatiṣṭhate*), v68 (*pratiṣṭhitā*), v70 (*acalapratiṣṭham*), v72 (*sthitis*, *sthitvāsyām*); *Bg* 3. 3 (*niṣṭhā*), v20 (*āsthitā*), v21 (*śreṣṭhas*), v31 (*anutīṣṭhanti*), v32 (*nānutīṣṭhanti*), v35 (*svanuṣṭhitāt*); *Bg* 4.23 (*jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ*), v42 (*ātiṣṭhottiṣṭha*); *Bg* 5.4 (*āsthitas*), v5 (*sthānam*), v12 (*naiṣṭhikīm*), v17 (*tanniṣṭhās*), v19 (*sthitam*, *sthitās*), v20 (*sthirabuddhis*); *Bg* 6.8 (*kūṭastho*), v9 (*asthadveṣyabandhuṣu*), v10 (*sthitas*), v11 (*pratiṣṭhāpya*, *sthiram*), v13 (*sthiras*), v19 (*nivāstha*), v21 (*sthitāś*), v25 (*ātmasaṁstham*), v26 (*asthiram*), v33 (*sthitim*, *sthirām*), v38 (*apraṭiṣṭho*); *Bg* 7.18 (*āsthitas*), v20 (*āsthiya*); *Bg* 8.12 (*āsthitas*); *Bg* 11.33 (*tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha*), v34 (*vyathiṣṭhā*); *Bg* 12.8 (*sthiram*), v19 (*sthiramatis*); *Bg* 13.7 (*sthairyam*); *Bg* 14.18 (*sattvasthā*, *tiṣṭhanti*, *jaghanyagunavṛttisthā*), v23 (*yovatiṣṭhati*), v24 (*svasthas*); *Bg* 15.10 (*sthitam*); *Bg* 16.1 (*jñānayogavyavasthitiḥ*), v8 (*apraṭiṣṭham*), v24 (*kāryākāryavyavasthitau*); *Bg* 17.1 (*niṣṭhā*), v6 (*śarīrastham-x2*), v8 (*sthirā*), v28 (*sthitis*); *Bg* 18.47 (*svanuṣṭhitāt*), v73 (*sthitosmi*).

<sup>1014</sup> For “indifferent,” see *nirdvandvo*.

is standing “steady in meditation” (*sthitadhīs*, *Bg* 2.56).<sup>1015</sup> The responses to Dhuryodhana’s stubborn resistance to compromise and his scorching insults when diplomacies failed made it apparent that the brothers struggled to remain *sthitadhīs*. Anger (*krodhas* in the *Bg*) is one of the war’s most often repeated emotional experiences, and armies (and heroes) often flee for fear of their lives.

*Bg* 5.19-28 mentions passion, fear, and anger. For example, the cycle of re-birth is “conquered” by the one whose “mind is standing in [the practice of] impartiality” (*sāmye sthitam manaḥ*, *Bg* 5.18). That person at that time is “therefore, standing in Brahman (*sthitās*).<sup>1016</sup> Kṛṣṇa continues to expound that rightly perceiving the battlefield as an indifferent-minded *kṣatriya* means conducting the war with an “unshakeable intelligence” (*sthirabuddhis*), enabling one to neither “rejoice” nor “tremble” in the tides of war (*Bg* 5.20).<sup>1017</sup> Recalling our previous discussion regarding Arjuna’s trembling mind, he did not enter the war mentally prepared with a *sthirabuddhis* (*cf.* *Bg* 1.29). Again, *krodha* appears again in *Bg* 5.23, 26, and Kṛṣṇa specifically mentions “desire” (*kāma*) with fear (*bhaya*) and anger in *Bg* 5.28. The above occurrences become even more important since v23 specifically reinforces the primary day-to-day discipline of actively enduring the temporal combat emotions (*cf.* Ch. 6.2). The “fortunate” *kṣatriya* who stands “disciplined in *yoga*,” (*yuktas*) is the one who can “endure the shock before the liberation of the body that rises from desire and anger.”<sup>1018</sup> I suggest that the symbolic mental picture of ‘standing’ becomes the metaphor for restoring or remaining one’s combat readiness.

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<sup>1015</sup> *duḥkheṣv anudvīghanamāḥ; sukheṣu vigatasprhas; vītarāgabhayakrodhas.*

<sup>1016</sup> *tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitās*

<sup>1017</sup> See *Bg* 5.20, *na prahr̥ṣyet priyam prāpya nodvijet prāpya cāpriyam sthirabuddhir asaṃmūḍho brahmaṇi brahmaṇi sthitas.* *Cf.* Ch 7.2.5, for “one should not tremble,” *nodvijet* (*na + udvijet*).

<sup>1018</sup> *Vigatecchābhayakrodho.* In the context of vv20-28. See *śaknotīhaiva yaḥ soḍhum prāk śarīravimokṣaṇāt. kāmakrodhodbhavaṃ vegam sa yuktaḥ sa sukhī naras.*

## 7.4 Examples of Ontology/Theology

Regarding examples associated with Kṛṣṇa's ontology,<sup>1019</sup> I will focus on *Bg* 10. In v11, referring to the “constantly disciplined” (*satatayuktānām*) *kṣatriya* who “lovingly worships” Kṛṣṇa, he reciprocates the affection and “destroys the darkness originating from ignorance” through the “shining lamp of knowledge” as he [Kṛṣṇa] “stands indwelling in their own being” (*ātmabhāvasthas*).<sup>1020</sup> Arjuna responds by acknowledging his understanding of Kṛṣṇa as the “God of Gods, the Lord of the Universe” (vv12-15).<sup>1021</sup> Upon requests, Arjuna asks how “he may [possibly] know” (*vidyām*) Kṛṣṇa's “complete” (*aśeṣeṇa*,v16) divine nature so that he may “constantly think” about him while on the battlefield (*tvām sadā paricintayan*, v17). Kṛṣṇa responds in v20, “I am the *ātman*, “[standing] dwelling in the hearts of all beings” (*sarvabhūtāśayasthitas*), the Himālaya of “unshakables” (*sthāvarāṇām*, v25). Following the long block of ontological teaching (*Bg* 2.9-10.42), Kṛṣṇa ends with a rhetorical question in v42, “But, what is this extensive knowledge to you, Arjuna?” He then reveals his final ontological revelation, “I constantly stand supporting this world by a single-fraction of myself” (*sthita*).<sup>1022</sup> As the occurrences associated with ontology and mental discipline continue, the reader is to understand Arjuna's declaration (vv12-15) as a total embracement of all that Kṛṣṇa is as he sees Kṛṣṇa with

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<sup>1019</sup> See *Bg* 1.30 (*avasthātum*); *Bg* 2.24 (*sthānus*), v72 (*sthitis*, *sthitvāsyām*); *Bg* 3.5 (*jātu tiṣṭhaty*), v15 (*pratiṣṭhitam*), v34 (*vyavasthitau*), v40 (*asyādhiṣṭhānam*); *Bg* 4.6 (*adhiṣṭhāya*), v8 (*dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya*), v42 (*yogam ātiṣṭhottīṣṭha*); *Bg* 5.20 (*brahmaṇi sthitaḥ*); *Bg* 6.14 (*brahmacārivrate sthitas*), v15 (*matsaṁsthām 'me*), v29 (*sarvabhūtasthitam*), v31 (*sarvabhūtasthitam, bhajaty ekatvam āsthitas*); *Bg* 7.18 (*āsthitas*); *Bg* 8.22 (*yasyāntaḥsthāni bhūtāni*), v28 (*sthānam*); *Bg* 9.4 (*matsthāni, avasthitas*), v5 (*na ca matsthāni bhūtāni, na ca bhūtaṣtho*), v6 (*yathākāśasthitas*) *matsthānīty*, v18 (*sthānam*); *Bg* 10.11 (*aham ajñānam tamaḥ nāśayāmy ātmabhāvasthas*), v16 (*tvam vyāpya tiṣṭhasi*), v20 (*sarvabhūtāśayasthitaas*), v25 (*sthāvarāṇām himālayaḥ Kṛṣṇa*), v42 (*sthito jagat*); *Bg* 11.7 (*ihaikastham jagat*), v13 (*tatraikastham jagat kṛtsnam*), v15 (*kamalāsanastham*); *Bg* 12.3 (*kūṭastham*); *Bg* 13.13 (*sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati*), v15 (*dūrastham*), v17 (*hṛdi sarvasya viṣṭhitam*), v21 (*puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho*), v26 (*sthāvarajaṅgamam*), v27 (*samaṁ sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantaṁ parameśvaram vinaśyatsv avinaśyantaṁ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*), v30 (*ekastham*), v31 (*śarīrasthopī*), v32 (*sarvatrāvasthito dehe*); *Bg* 14.27 (*brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham*); *Bg* 15.3 (*na ca saṁpratiṣṭhā ... asvattah*), v7 (*prakṛtisthāni*), v9 (*prakṛtisthāni*), v11 (*avasthitam the yogins*), v16 (*kūṭasthokṣara*); *Bg* 18.14 (*adhiṣṭhānam tathā kartā karaṇam*), v50 (*niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā*), v61 (*tīsvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hṛddeśerjuna tiṣṭhati*).

<sup>1020</sup> See *teṣām evānukampārtham aham ajñānam tamaḥ nāśayāmy ātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā*.

<sup>1021</sup> Literally, “God God, the Lord of the Universe,” *devadeva jagatpate*.

<sup>1022</sup> *athavā bahunaitena kiṁ jñātena tavārjuna viṣṭabhyāham idaṁ kṛtsnam ekāṁśena sthito jagat*.

him driving his chariot. Seeing Kṛṣṇa as “Lord of Beings, God of Gods, Lord of the Universe” (*bhūteśa devadeva jagatpate*) as Kṛṣṇa accompanies him in war should embolden Arjuna. Knowing who is with him in his chariot should increase his desire and capacity to endure the traumas of *karmanighora*. However, this is often not the case in the war to come. I will now examine the imperatives of √*sthā*.

### 7.5 *Sthāpaya*: “Re-manuever my chariot to stand between the two armies.” (*Bg* 1.21)

Keeping in mind the mnemonic pattern focusing on Kṛṣṇa’s ontology and the mental means to fulfill his pre-war commitment, the first imperative form of √*sthā* is *sthāpaya* in *Bg* 1.21.<sup>1023</sup> *Bg* 1 contains the most occurrences of root √*sthā*.<sup>1024</sup> For example, the Kurus were strategically “deployed” to protect *Bhīṣma* as they formed their battlelines (*avasthitās*, *Bg* 1.11; 2.6). Arjuna looked across the field while “standing” in his chariot (*sthitau*, *Bg* 1.14). Having seen them “standing in position” (*vyavasthitān*, *Bg* 1.20), he directed Kṛṣṇa to *re*-manuever his chariot so that he could “stand” in ‘no man's land’ (*sthāpaya*, *Bg* 1.21)<sup>1025</sup> and “see” (*nirikṣe*) the “battle-hungry” (*yoddhukāmān*) Kurus strategically “standing in [battle] formation” (*avasthitān*, *Bg* 1.22, *cf.* v33).<sup>1026</sup> Though they are “standing” (*sthitān*, *Bg* 1.26) before him, Arjuna misperceived their status when he considered that he must fight and kill them. As they were “standing near him” (*samupasthitam*, *Bg* 1.28), his *dharma* crisis began to snowball within his “heart” (*hṛdaya*)

<sup>1023</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> sg. causative active impv.

<sup>1024</sup> This is the third cluster of variations of √*sthā*. See *Bg* 1.16 (*yudhiṣṭhiras*), v20 (*vyavasthitān*), v21 (*sthāpaya*), v22 (*nirikṣeḥaṃ yoddhukāmān avasthitān*), v24 (*sthāpayivā*), v26 (*sthitān*), v27 (*avasthitān*), v28 (*yuyutsum samupasthitam*), v33 (*imevasthitā yuddhe*); *Bg* 2.6 (*tevasthitāḥ pramukhe*); *Bg* 11.36 (*yevasthitāḥ pratyānīkeṣu yodhāḥ*). The fourth cluster of examples do not fit into a cluster, e.g., epithets. See *Bg* 10.19 (*kuruśreṣṭha*); *Bg* 11.36 (*sthāne*); *Bg* 17.12 (*bharataśreṣṭha*).

<sup>1025</sup> See *sthāpayivā* for reference to Kṛṣṇa driving his chariot to the middle of the field.

<sup>1026</sup> See *Bg* 1.33, “standing in battle-formation,” *imevasthitā yuddhe*.

whereby he quickly confessed he was no longer able at that time “to stand” *as he was* when he entered the war (*avasthātum*, *Bg* 1.30).<sup>1027</sup>

In v30, I infer that in the infinitive, “to stand” represents his ability to do what he was *expected* to do, what both armies *assumed* he was doing when he requested Kṛṣṇa to re-maneuver his chariot. But he “no longer had the ability” to maintain his combat readiness (*na ca śaknomy*).<sup>1028</sup> The assumption of *sthāpaya* in v21 is that he *could* do all that he had promised the night before, but when the time came, he failed to display the character of a *kṛtanpauruṣha*, “one who does a manly act, behaving gallantly.”<sup>1029</sup> Shocking to all, Arjuna became an unmanly man (*vipuṃsaka*),<sup>1030</sup> a trembling (*klīybayate*) embodiment of Duryodhana’s insults toward his manhood, the same abuses that caused him to vow to win the war.<sup>1031</sup>

Commentators vary in viewing this initial scene, and Ranganathananda, Mujumbar, Zaehner, and Sankaracarya do not comment on v21.<sup>1032</sup> But other commentators in the symbolic tradition make several insightful comments. For example, though Whitney has no direct commentary on *Bg* 1, he would view Arjuna’s request and inability to stand in battle as his ego’s symbolic usurpation of the Self. The underlying context of the *Mhba* is that humanity is in a defeated state, like a “kingdom [that] has been overthrown and the rightful king exiled.”<sup>1033</sup> Yogananda emphasizes the allegorical nature of Arjuna’s posture representing a spiritual warrior’s tension between sensory responses and the soul. He explains that Arjuna is requesting Kṛṣṇa to

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<sup>1027</sup> I have changed the present tense of *na ca śaknomy avasthātum* (“I am no longer able to stand”) to the past tense for narrative preference.

<sup>1028</sup> *Śaknomy* is a *pr. indic. act. of √śak*.

<sup>1029</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 302.

<sup>1030</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 951. See the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.

<sup>1031</sup> See *Bhīṣma Parvan*. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 324.

<sup>1032</sup> Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, vol.1, 76; Majumdar, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 59. Zaehner, R.C., *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Warrior, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 11.

<sup>1033</sup> Whitney, *River of Compassion*, 8.

maneuver “the chariot of intuition between the subtle divine perceptions and the gross sense perceptions.”<sup>1034</sup> Gandhi provides a less symbolic interpretation, and he reminds the reader that Arjuna had no qualms with fighting and killing. Had he so, he would have informed Kṛṣṇa before the war because “he was always prepared to fight.”<sup>1035</sup> Although they are in the symbolic camp, Yogananda and Ranganathananda add “on the eve of battle” to v21, which I take as an acknowledgment of the symbolic *and* the physical battle.<sup>1036</sup>

Fowler places more emphasis on the physical combat context, i.e., she comments that though Arjuna will “place himself physically between good and evil . . .,” it will be later that he is “mentally” ready [to fight].<sup>1037</sup> Radhakrishnan mentions that when he faced his opponents, Arjuna realized that his “whole scheme of life” must be “abandoned.”<sup>1038</sup> However, as Prabhupada comments, Duryodhana’s stubborn reluctance to seek peace had “forced” him to enter the war; therefore, he was “very anxious” to identify the Kuru leaders who were “bent upon demanding an unwanted war.”<sup>1039</sup> Citing Minor, Tsoukalas notes that the appellation, *acyuta* (“O Unmovable One”), may mean nothing more than a contrast between his upcoming crisis and the presence of Kṛṣṇa who as Lord is *the* unmovable one.<sup>1040</sup> In a matter of moments, Arjuna allowed his “whole scheme of life” to be dominated by the *guṇas* (primarily sorrow). Still, he will remember Kṛṣṇa standing as *acyuta* with him.<sup>1041</sup>

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<sup>1034</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita: God Talks with Arjuna*, 129,

<sup>1035</sup> Strohmeier, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita: According to Gandhi*, 6.

<sup>1036</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita: God Talks with Arjuna*, vol. 1, 20;

<sup>1037</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 9.

<sup>1038</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, 96.

<sup>1039</sup> Prabhupada, *Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, 45.

<sup>1040</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgita*, vol.1, 51. Tsoukalas also calls attention to the following verses where Arjuna calls Kṛṣṇa *acyuta* (*Bg* 11.42; 18.73).

<sup>1041</sup> I am referencing Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, 96.



The final reference to “standing” in *Bg* 1 is the dramatic scene in v47 where Arjuna “sat down upon his chariot seat [between the armies in battle]” (*rathopastha upāviśat*). The author has made an intentional connection by framing *Bg* 1.21-47 as an inclusio.<sup>1042</sup> What initially appeared to be Arjuna moving toward fulfilling his pre-war commitment (*sthāpaya*, v.21) later became the symbol of the rejection of his destiny and pre-war promise (*upastha*, v. 47). By ending with *upastha*, which shares the root √*sthā*, the text directs the reader inward to Kṛṣṇa’s ontological and missional teaching. Once the reader knows both (v12-30), the reader moves on to the supreme means of fighting (be it victory or death), namely the “correct mental attitude” (*Bg* 2.39) and an “informed resolute-nature” (*Bg* 2.41).<sup>1043</sup> Both will free him from the positive/negative thoughts and feelings associated with combat (*Bg* 2.38-72)<sup>1044</sup> Therefore, how can we understand *sthāpaya* in *Bg* 1.21 in light of *upastha* in v47?

One can understand the opening chapter from the perspective of the vacillating model of Arjuna in the *Mhba*. Fowler comments that “scorcher of foes” (*paraṃtapa*) is a flattering reference to his pre-war reputation,<sup>1045</sup> recalling his pre-war renown, but he restrains his prowess in the coming days. First, he is passionate; then, he is hesitant. Next, he is calm and collected, and then he makes a rash oath. When read from the perspective of the combat context and Arjuna’s later struggles, *sthāpaya* foreshadows a pattern in the *Mhba*. For example, *Bg* 1.21-47 only *appears to be* a severe contrast between Arjuna’s *a-dharma* hesitancy to complete Kṛṣṇa’s “work” (*Bg* 3.1, 8; 11.55) and the Kuru’s dharmic advance toward his lines. (*Bg* 1.1-19). His unexpected crisis is just another example of the back-and-forth model of his character. Arjuna will be carried away to

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<sup>1042</sup> See Ch. 7.2.

<sup>1043</sup> *vyavasāyātmikā buddhis*.

<sup>1044</sup> I opt for Tsoukalas’ rendering of *budhis*. The negative thoughts and feelings can be understood as nonphysical traumas.

<sup>1045</sup> Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 21.

disorder and returned to combat readiness and effectiveness like a man caught in the ebb and flow of the tides. The *Bg* is a scene where he returns.

The Kuru leadership first appears to be righteous, but they were never anything other than a mixed bag of *dharma* heroes and *a-dharma* villains (e.g., Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Duryodhana, Bhīṣma, Karna, Kṛpā). Arjuna appeared to be in a decisively unwinnable position, a complete about-face, but taking account of his later performance in combat, his decision to seat himself was his first step toward seeking Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* (*Bg* 2.7). In the epic to come, Kṛṣṇa will again pause in the battle to provide ontologically/theologically substantiated teaching (*śādhi*) that will enable Arjuna to return to the fight (see Ch. 8). As will be shown, the very beginning of his request for *śādhi* is the first step toward restoration, for though he knew he was in an untenable situation, his mind “wandering” (*cañcalaṃ*, *Bg* 6.34), he still knew Kṛṣṇa as *acyuta* (*Bg* 1.30). The guṇic siege has not sacked the fortress of his epistemological infrastructure to the point that he cannot seek victory through Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*. He may feel like he is the only *kṣatriya* experiencing such a crisis (which is doubtful), but there will be many more before the end of the 18 days. More importantly, as will be seen in the war, Kṛṣṇa’s presence remains with him as the unshakable, unmovable one. Kṛṣṇa as *acyuta* is the ultimate *śādhi*.

### **7.6 *Uttiṣṭha*: “Stand up” (*Bg* 2.3)**

I now examine the imperative active form of *uttiṣṭha* occurring four times (*Bg* 2:3, v37; 4:42; 11:33). It only appears as a directive from Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna, and in each of these occurrences, *uttiṣṭha* follows *tasmāt* (3x).<sup>1046</sup> *Uttiṣṭha* in *Bg* 2.3 was Kṛṣṇa’s first response to Arjuna’ faulty

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<sup>1046</sup> See *Bg* 2.37; 4.42; 11.33. See Divanji, *Critical Word-Index to the Bhagavadgītā*, 32

perception and reasoning (*Bg* 1.21-47). He recognized how the imminent threat of *kaśmala* had “advanced toward him in a time of danger” (*viṣame samupasthitam*, v2). In another visual reversal, Arjuna is being attacked from within as the Kurus approach him across the field. Kṛṣṇa is rightly perceiving the mass of the guṇic forces compelling him to be weak, unmanly, cowardly, disgraceful, and unfit for command (v2-3). The locative *viṣame* can be translated with the sense of “with reference to distress,” and so he is *kaśmalam* as a *byproduct* of distress.<sup>1047</sup> He is in mortal danger, but the core issue is that he was distressing *in* battle because of his faulty *guṇa-karma* perception and reason.

The gerund *tyaktvā* (“having/after abandoning”) in v3 implies an action before the main verb (*uttiṣṭha*).<sup>1048</sup> The prior act of abandoning familiar relationships is the action that precedes and substantiates the imperative (“stand/up”).<sup>1049</sup> This means that he can only stand *after* he repels (abandons) the guṇic assault within his interior life. Therefore, he is to first abandon the “unmanly weakness of heart”<sup>1050</sup> stemming from the domination of his *guṇa-karma* ‘infrastructure.’<sup>1051</sup> Then, and only then, he is to stand, fight, and kill.<sup>1052</sup> Tsoukalas notes Zaehner’s comments on *Bg* 8.12, referring to the heart as the “seat of contemplation.”<sup>1053</sup>

Tsoukalas continues by noting the lack of explicit teaching in the *Bg* regarding *hṛdaya*, and there are multiple occurrences where the term is used interchangeably with *ātman* (see *Bg* 8.12; 13.17; 15.15; 18.16).<sup>1054</sup> As previously stated, both Arjuna’s *ātman* and Kṛṣṇa’s *ātman* are

<sup>1047</sup> Whitney, *River of Compassion*, 96.

<sup>1048</sup> Zaehner, R. C., *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 49.

<sup>1049</sup> I borrow this from many personal conversations with Tsoukalas who coined the phrase. See also Tsoukalas’ commentary on *Bg* 4.42 in *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 143.

<sup>1050</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 105.

<sup>1051</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 106.

<sup>1052</sup> I will briefly address the commands to “fight” and “kill” following the examination of  $\sqrt{kr}$ .

<sup>1053</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1, 108. In v3, is “unmanly weakness of heart” a wound to the soul?

<sup>1054</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgīta*, vol. 1, 108.

immutable, and Kṛṣṇa “dwells in the hearts of all” (*hṛdaya*). I agree with Tsoukalas that *hṛdaya* is synonymous with the *ātman* (soul); therefore, “unmanly weakness” cannot be a trauma to the heart or soul. What is traumatized must be something other than the *hṛdaya* or *ātman*. I suggest what is traumatized is the *capacity* to perceive (*paśya*) the nature of combat with clarity and understanding, to know (*viddhi*) one’s own and Kṛṣṇa ontology, and then endure (*titikṣasva*) the phenomena regardless of what it *feels like it is in the heart*. Therefore, nonphysical trauma is not a wound to Arjuna’s ontological being. It is a “trauma,” but it is a trauma to his *guṇa-karma* epistemology. Like breakers, the waves of the *guṇas* pound his ability to remain indifferent and singularly focused upon Kṛṣṇa.

Fowler refers to his crisis as a “state of suspension” (see her comments on v.2), citing Alan Jacobs, who thinks of it in terms of a “mental oppression” known as “Hamlet’s Disease.”<sup>1055</sup> Arjuna’s “pity” or “compassion” was “causing a state of total suspension.”<sup>1056</sup> It is common for interpreters to translate *uttiṣṭha* and provide shallow (or no) contextualized commentary. For example, Warriar does not comment on *Bg* 2.3 in his translation of Śaṅkara’s commentary, though there is a summary and an extensive analysis following *Bg* 2.10.<sup>1057</sup> Yogananda interprets *uttiṣṭha* as “Lift yourself from the sense strongholds to the higher spinal centers of divine consciousness.”<sup>1058</sup> He continues his symbolic commitment when he details the benefit of Kṛṣṇa’s choice of words. While he writes one sentence on the literal meaning of Kṛṣṇa’s intention to motivate Arjuna to a “positive dutiful action befitting his true soul nature,” the “deeper spiritual

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<sup>1055</sup> Fowler, Jeaneane, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 19, cited from Alan Jacobs, translator, *The Bhagavad Gita: A transcreation of The Song Elestial* (Winchester: O Books, 2003), 7.

<sup>1056</sup> Fowler, Jeaneane, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 19, cited from Alan Jacobs, translator, *The Bhagavad Gita: A transcreation of The Song Elestial* (Winchester: O Books, 2003), 7. Fowler’s final commentary on v.2 regarding Arjuna’s relationship with Kṛṣṇa at this moment needs clarification, “Krishna is speaking here as the charioteer o Arjuna, Krishna the man, whose unction it is to counsel the warrior. Therefore, we should not be surprised that his words are man to man and not God to man at this point”. Why bifurcate Kṛṣṇa the man and Kṛṣṇa the ‘God?’

<sup>1057</sup> Warriar, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, 16-20

<sup>1058</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks to Arjuna*, 176.

implication” is found in his reference to Arjuna as the “scorcher of foes” (*paramtapa*). The title points to the importance of the “life energy and consciousness” moving through the *chakras*. The command is “symbolizing the power of the fire element in the lumbar center.”<sup>1059</sup>

Majumbar connects the historical Kurukṣetra and the inevitability of war by stating, “violence is never an ideal in civilized society, but it cannot be ignored.”<sup>1060</sup> He continues the same pattern connecting the civic responsibility of ancient *kṣatriyas* and contemporary warriors, but he lifts up “non-violent resistance” as the “most civilized method of facing evil.” On the one hand, Majumbar’s idyllic interpretation directly contradicts Kṛṣṇa’s authoritative statement for the *kṣatriya* caste; “nothing exists that is superior to *dharma*-warfare.”<sup>1061</sup> But on the other hand, his reading coincides with the Pāṇḍu’s exaggerated attempts to avoid war. Yet again, the fact that only ¼ of *dharma* remains in the *Kali Yuga* and the swell of nonphysical trauma (e.g, anger, revenge) combine to explain why the ideal remains only an ideal.<sup>1062</sup>

Zaehner conglomerates *Bg* 1.43-2.4, making no explicit mention of Kṛṣṇa’s use of *uttisha* in *Bg* 2.3. However, he connects *Bg* 2.3 and 11.33 with the reference of Kṛṣṇa’s “divine plan” being Arjuna’s role as the “principle agent of destruction.” He then surmises by connecting *Bg* 11.33 and Kṛṣṇa’s overall intention for Arjuna’s role and expected temporary rewards at Kurukṣetra, “And so stand up. ... Long since these men in truth been slain by Me; yours it is to be the mere occasion.”<sup>1063</sup> Though a mere surface-level summation, Zaehner allows the combat context to inform his gloss of *Bg* 2.43-2.4.

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<sup>1059</sup> Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks to Arjuna*, 177.

<sup>1060</sup> Majumbar, Sachindra A, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 66-68.

<sup>1061</sup> My translation. See *dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyonyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate*.

<sup>1062</sup> See McGrath, . This is a major interpretive lens for McGrath.

<sup>1063</sup> Zaehner, R. C., *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 120.

Thus, Arjuna sat (*upāviśat*), which also symbolized the conclusion of his misperception of combat's nature and the battlefield's reality. He threw down Gāṇḍīva under the siege of the *guṇas* of sorrow which dominated his *guṇa-karma* epistemology, what Larry Kent Graham recently called the “integrative process,” and what Wilson calls the “inner structural dimensions” and the governing “psychological processes” of the posttraumatic self.”<sup>1064</sup> Thus, his heart “recoiled away” (*Bg* 2.42) from the opposing Kurus in the act of abandonment, but it is the wrong kind of abandonment. This kind of abandonment was a surrender to attachment, the opposite of Kṛṣṇa’s command in *Bg* 2.47, “You must not become attached to non-action.” The swell of the *guṇic* tide has caused *karma*-attachment to the nonphysical trauma of sorrow.<sup>1065</sup> Metaphorically speaking, he turned his back on his brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, the indomitable presence of Kṛṣṇa, his fellow loyal *kṣatriyas* seeking a mokṣic death, and the Kurus waiting and hoping for the same fate.

The import of the imperative is that Kṛṣṇa’s initial *śādhī* is not overtly ontological or theological; it is a warning of not fulfilling his pre-war promise. Zaehner notes that *Bg* 2.1-38 are still “firmly in the context of the Epic,” thus Kṛṣṇa is focusing upon a “very practical goal.”<sup>1066</sup> It is as if Kṛṣṇa thought a straightforward rebuke and exhortation would jolt the veteran Arjuna to his senses so that he would remember his prior ontological knowledge and recall his experience with the *guṇas* of war.

In *Bg* 2.3, the nonphysical trauma that Arjuna experienced before the war had so completely disordered his “inner world of experience” that he countered the rebuke with a more extensive explanation of why he was confused and unwilling to move forward to restore

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<sup>1064</sup> See *saṁvigna*.

<sup>1065</sup> See Graham, Larry Kent, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls*, 79; Wilson uses “govern” where I change it to an adverb, Wilson, John P., ed., *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9, See *śokasaṁvignamānasas*. So also, Prabhupada, captures the causative nature of the “sorrowful regret” (*śoka*) in *Bg* 1.47. See Prabhupada, *Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, 46.

<sup>1066</sup> Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 121.

Yudhiṣṭhira to his throne (*Bg* 2.9). In *Bg* 2.3, to “rise up” and stand one’s ground, *especially* when severely assaulted by emotions of grief and moral guilt (*cf.* *Bg* 1.45, 2.5), is a simple case of knowing what one’s *dharma*-dictated, caste-required commitment entails—fighting and killing. Unlike Arjuna’s vacillation in the war, it is not simply a command to stand and fight (*Bg* 2.3, 18, 30; 3.30; 11.33, 34). Both imperatives are included in *Bg* 11.34; thus, standing up in battle is fighting and killing (see *jahi* in *Bg* 11.34). Arjuna should have killed the *guṇas* in the equal measure that he *should have* engaged the Kurus. Killing his opponents and the common combat emotions and nonphysical traumas will be difficult in the days to come (see Ch. 8).

Here and in some cases in the war, Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* is merely a short exhortation of *kṣatriya* responsibilities or a pre-war promise. This abbreviated and efficient aspect of *śādhī* is repeated multiple times in the war. For example, in the *Droṇa Parvan* CXLIV, Kṛṣṇa reminds Arjuna of his invincibility.<sup>1067</sup> As the battle continued into the night, the tide tipped in favor of Droṇa, Karna, and the Kurus, who killed thousands and inflicted thousands of casualties. The route saddened Kṛṣṇa. Even though he and Arjuna momentarily stopped the entire retreat, the army was near defeat. At that time, Kṛṣṇa encouraged the army by reminding them that he and Arjuna had provided protection, but then he spoke to Arjuna and called upon him to lead the army for only he could rally the distraught men. In this scene, Kṛṣṇa reminded him of his leadership role and how the lesser *kṣatriyas* looked upon him as an example of courage and commitment. There is no extended discussion of his ontology. In response, Arjuna heeds inspirational words, takes up his place at the front of the force, and successfully leads the counter-attack. The men of both armies recognized that only the mighty Arjuna could have accomplished the turnaround.<sup>1068</sup>

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<sup>1067</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLIV, 323.

<sup>1068</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXII, 397.

*Bg* 2.3, Kṛṣṇa focuses on Arjuna, his promise, and his performance to fulfill his duty. In this first example, there is no ontological teaching. In *Droṇa Parva* CXLIV, Kṛṣṇa simply calls upon Arjuna’s to remember his reputation (invincible) and responsibilities. I will now briefly examine when the adverb *tasmād* precedes the imperative.

### 7.7 *Tasmād Uttiṣṭha*: “Stand up” (*Bg* 2.37)

*Bg* 2.37; 4.42; and 11.33 follow the pattern—ontology and caste duty precede the imperative to fulfill his commitment to his pre-war promise.<sup>1069</sup> All three will be addressed, but I will not go into great detail for *Bg* 4.42 and 11.33.

Kṛṣṇa’s first exhortation failed to convince Arjuna to stand and fight. He remained in a state of disorder and expanded his objection in *Bg* 2.4-9. Kṛṣṇa responded a second time in v10-37, employing *tasmād uttiṣṭha* in v37, “therefore, stand up.” In a diagram of *Bg* 2.11-37, Zaehner breaks down Kṛṣṇa’s four reasons: (A) the *dehina/ātman* (“embodied self”) is eternal and immutable to combat (vv12-25); (B) part of the reality of war is the cyclical nature of birth, life, death, rebirth, repeat (vv26-29); (C) the necessity of *dharma*-dictated, caste-required combat in a justified war (vv31-33), (D) not facing his duty to fight and kill is a disgraceful, unsuitable, unmanly act of *a-dharma*.<sup>1070</sup> In one final remark from Zaehner, he links reasons A & B to Kṛṣṇa’s ontological teaching on the nature of humanity (in the combat context); reasons C & D pertain to Arjuna’s commitment to his pre-war promise as a *kṣatriya*. However, I disagree with Zaehner that Kṛṣṇa’s teachings in v9-37 were made in and for the combat context, yet v39-72 were made in *but* for an esoteric, contemplative exercise where his future readers (especially *kṣatriyas*) are “taken

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<sup>1069</sup> Zaehner states that the back and forth from practical to philosophical teaching repeats itself. See Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 121.

<sup>1070</sup> Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 121.



out of the immediate practical context and enter into a more speculative sphere.”<sup>1071</sup> The dominant symbolic party line may be influencing the split of contexts. One can argue that v39-72 is more esoteric in tone, but just because Kṛṣṇa becomes highly philosophical does not mean he is less practical. In the war, he (and others) repeatedly respond to the traumas of combat with long narrations specifically purposed to re-order the hero right there and then. Deep ontological accounts are prevalent.

Kṛṣṇa’s first response was a simple call to remember his Aryan nature and his pre-war commitment. As Zaehner put it, it was a practical response to the immediate situation. In a sense, Kṛṣṇa bluntly said, “What are you thinking? You’re a *kṣatriya*; Act like a *kṣatriya*.” It referred to Arjuna’s ontology, not Kṛṣṇa’s ontology. However, his second response referenced his *kṣatriya* duties (vv31-37), but they are not predicated upon Arjuna’s pre-war promise, commitment, or status among other great *kṣatriyas* (vs2-3). In contrast, Kṛṣṇa’s ontology in v12-30 predicates his duties (vv31-36) and the command in v37, which I surmise, “If you die in combat, you go to heaven; If you are victorious, you enjoy the spoils of war (*cf. Bg 18.78*). Therefore, stand up [and fight and kill].”

Arjuna should not stand *as* combat-ready *if* he does *not* know Kṛṣṇa’s ontology (vv12-30). But, *when* he understands his ontology (vv12-30) and can become indifferent to whom he kills, he then will be able to “patiently endure” the assault of the *guṇas* [that caused him to mourn]. Then, he may fulfill his commitment to his pre-war promise (vv31-36). Arjuna has received sufficient *śādhī* to obey the command in v37. Though he did not do so, he could have returned to battle after *Bg 2.3* or v37, or *Bg 4.42*, after his declaration in *Bg 11.1*, or after *Bg 11.33* following the vision of the Cosmic Form. His knowledge was sufficient, but it was not complete. His preparation was

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<sup>1071</sup> It would be not unlike Shay’s reference to “narrative time,” though Zaehner is thinking of a noncombat context.

adequate, but it was not advanced training beyond the fundamentals. He continues to seek more revelation, which implies that combat readiness is much more than embracing one's *dharma*. From the perspective of the *Bg*, the *kṣatriya* needs advanced training in *Bg* 12-18 to bear up under the pressure of the *guṇas* associated with nonphysical combat trauma. They need it to truly see and truly understand the battlefield (*Bg* 13). But, as shown in the following chapter, even the advanced training does not insulate Arjuna (anyone) at Kurukṣetra.

The final two words in v37 are *yuddhāya kṛtaniścayas*, “Resolved for battle.” Monier Williams provides a few options, e.g., “resolute” and “determined in the context of a speech.”<sup>1072</sup> It could be that the choice of *kṛtaniścayas* with the root √*kr* (“work”) is a subtle shot across the bow of the skilled orator. The implication is that he should have been “resolved” to complete his work in the killing field rather than making ill-reasoned speeches. However, it can also have the sense of “one who has acquired anything, certain, sure.” In the *Pancatantra*, there is the sense of “one who has formed a resolution.”<sup>1073</sup> A *kṛtamati* in the *Karna Parvann* is “one who has taken a resolution.”<sup>1074</sup> Arjuna should be “happy,” like one who has “accomplished meritorious acts in former lives” (*kṛtanpuṇya*).<sup>1075</sup> As a “man well trained,” Arjuna must make a decisive decision to commit himself to combat.<sup>1076</sup> Griffith teases out the meaning of the clause when he translates *yuddhāya yujyasva* (v38) as “prepare for war.”<sup>1077</sup> But, he then returns to the more literal and dominant rendering of “yoke yourself.” However, in the same sentence, he provides the possibility

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<sup>1072</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 302; “resolute in the *Kādambari*.”

<sup>1073</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 302. Interestingly, Arjuna was known as a great orator which could imply that he was assuming his skills would provide a convincing argument. See McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 11.

<sup>1074</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 302

<sup>1075</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 302. See *Rig Veda* and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purana*.

<sup>1076</sup> Zaehner, R. C., *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 50.

<sup>1077</sup> Griffiths, Bede, *River of Compassion*, 24

of translating it as “order yourself.”<sup>1078</sup> While he ultimately relates everything to the “battle of life,” his commentary allows for the order/disorder language. Therefore, when Arjuna again stands, he resolves to move forward as one who has been adequately re-ordered through *śādhi* for combat effectiveness.

We find the same model as above when *tasmād ... uttiṣṭha* is employed in *Bg* 4.42 and *tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha* in *Bg* 11.33. It is *Kṛṣṇa*’s ontology in *Bg* 4.1-14 that substantiates his command to “perform action” (*kurukarma*) in v15. It is also the basis of his practical teachings in vv16-41 which supports his command in v42 regarding Arjuna’s pre-war commitment.

In *Bg* 11.32, it is *Kṛṣṇa*’s identification as the *rupamaīṣvara* (vv9-30), and then “Time,” the “cause of universal dissolution” (v32), which substantiates the practical imperatives to fulfill his pre-war promise in v33-35: “Stand up!” “Attain victory!” “Be the mere agent!” “Never hesitate!” “Kill!” “Fight!” But, it is his request to see his “four-armed form” in v46 that leads to *Kṛṣṇa*’s return to his “previous form” (v50) that allows him to be “calmed” and “emboldened [in] his heart.” Thus, *Kṛṣṇa*’s ontology (*rupamaīṣvara & rūpeṇa caturbhujena*) substantiated his *means* of fulfilling his pre-war commitment and ultimately executing the war through single-minded devotion that is his unique *kṣatriya* combat-worship (v35-46). But, in the end, seeing the Cosmic Form is not what ultimately re-orders Arjuna. Instead, Arjuna is re-ordered when he sees *Kṛṣṇa*’s “human-like form” *standing with him infused by the Cosmic Form* (v51). Understanding the former as the latter causes him to say in v51, “I am steady. *Now* my thoughts (mind and heart) are restored to a normal state (i.e., combat-readiness).” Thus, with *Kṛṣṇa*’s ontology substantiating his pre-war commitment, he can stand, fight, and kill. And after seven more chapters, through the

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<sup>1078</sup> Griffiths, Bede, *River of Compassion*, 24.

“graced kindness” of Kṛṣṇa, he will end the dialogue by declaring, “I [*once again*] stand (*sthitas*) [in a state of] removed-doubt. I will [now] do your command” (*Bg* 18.74).

How a *kṣatriya* will fight is not the whole picture. It is doing so *as* one understands Kṛṣṇa’s ontology, specifically, how the *rupamaṣvara* predicates his “four-armed form” (*caturbhujena*), his “human-like gentle form” (*mānuṣaṃ rūpaṃ ... saumyaṃ*). After seeing *this latter* form in light of the former (*drṣṭvedam*, *Bg* 11.51), Arjuna makes the personal claim that he had “become in that moment restored to his original [pre-war] disposition.”<sup>1079</sup> Tsoukalas engages in a lengthy commentary on the translation of *sacetāḥ prakṛtiṃ gatas*.<sup>1080</sup> What is Arjuna’s “original material nature?” I opt for the sense of “normal state,” but what was Arjuna’s normal state? Arjuna’s restored mind is the result of his re-ordered “inner life of experience,” what he was assumed to be when he vowed to fulfill his pre-war promise and entered the field, what the imperative “stand” implies, what he in good intentions conveyed in *Bg* 11.1 and 18.73, a whole-hearted, indifferent, single-minded worship of Kṛṣṇa.

## 7.8 Sthānu: Knowing his Ontology; Fighting in his Presence

The ultimate means of *śādhi* is not simply a rightly ordered mentality of enjoining indifference to the performance of one’s combat-actions.”<sup>1081</sup> The greatest *śādhi* is to know Kṛṣṇa and to know *how* Kṛṣṇa fights in co-mission with you in the battle. It is seeing and understanding Kṛṣṇa with you and before you as the primary agent of killing. In the closing scene of the *Droṇa*

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<sup>1079</sup> *Drṣṭvā* is a gerund of √*drś* (“having seen/After seeing”); *idaṃ* is a Demonstrative Pronoun which I opt for my sense, *this latter* form predicated by the former. Second two *ślokas*, *idānīm asmi samvṛttaḥ sacetāḥ prakṛtiṃ gatas*

<sup>1080</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, 300-306. See discussion on *Bg* 11.50, p.300.

<sup>1081</sup> *Bg* 3.8, *niyataṃ kuru karma*.

*Parvan*, we find the Kuru hero, Aśvatthāmās (Droṇa’s son). Aśvatthāmās sought an explanation for his failure to kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

In *Droṇa Parvan CCI*, it is the evening of the fifth day of sustained combat. Both armies are physically and mentally exhausted.<sup>1082</sup> The battle is tipping toward the Kurus, and so the scene begins with the recent defeat of the Pāṇḍavās by Aśvatthāmā. In his severe grief, Arjuna singles out and challenges the victor, Aśvatthāmās, demeaning his prowess, manliness, and integrity, vowing to kill him if he dared to face him in a duel. These are cruel words, given that the two heroes are long-time friends with mutual affection and respect. King Dhṛtarāṣṭra requested of Sañjaya to know why Arjuna had uncharacteristically spoken in such a way to a great man, and so Sañjaya continued to narrate.

Filled with great wrath from Arjuna’s disrespectful challenge, “resolute in his chariot,” *Aśvatthāmās* invoked the celestial *Agneya* weapon, which incinerated thousands of men with such a scorching blaze that it caused darkness to envelop all that could be seen of the Pāṇḍavā army. Naturally, the Kurus roared like lions as they beheld the ashes and smelled the charred bodies of men and beasts concealed in smoke and darkness. The fantastic duo was presumed Killed In Action. However, all is not lost; all is not as it seemed. At that moment, Arjuna invoked the celestial *Brahma* weapon, endowed and gifted by Brahma. Then, the darkness began to lift, revealing a completely unharmed chariot with the unwounded Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. The tides now turn to the Pāṇḍavās, reinvigorated by the sight of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Aśvatthāmās is baffled and dismayed, and similar to Arjuna’s crisis, he wrongly perceived and concluded that all he knew to be true was not true. Having stepped down from his chariot, he walked away from the battle (the war). But all is not as it seemed. He meets Vāyasa standing on the road. Recognizing his status, he

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<sup>1082</sup> *Droṇa Parvan CCI*, 478-481. In the Sanskrit, see Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 172-173.

seeks to know why and what circumstances led to revoking the irrevocable *Agneya* weapon and why it failed to kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who also possessed human qualities.<sup>1083</sup>

Vāyasa begins by acknowledging the significance of this question, and then he explains that his defeat came from the person of Nārāyaṇa (Kṛṣṇa) on the field in the chariot with Arjuna.<sup>1084</sup> What follows is a detailed explanation of how the creator took the form through the birth of the son of Dharma, who then, through thousands of years of severe austerities, became “equal to Brahma”<sup>1085</sup> and beheld the Supreme Being (Hara). Dozens of appellations flow from Nārāyaṇa as he beholds and worships the Supreme Being. Having concluded, he asks for divine blessings (“boons”), which the “Great God” gladly dispenses. Nārāyaṇa is told that no being, human or divine, and no weapon, physical or celestial, can defeat him in combat even if he were to fight against the “Great God” himself (Mahadeva). In summary, the Supreme Being of the universe (Hara) has elevated Nārāyaṇa to the supreme status, which Vāyasa reveals to Aśvatthāmās is Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa). But, Vāyasa shared more. He explains that from Nārāyaṇa’s prior extreme austerities came Nara, co-equal to Narayana, known by the world as Arjuna.<sup>1086</sup> He explains that in every *yuga* (age), the duo “take their births” for “serving the purposes of the world” (*cf. Bg 4.7-8*).<sup>1087</sup> Yet, Aśvatthāmās was also born out of Rudra’s severe austerities and, having pleased Mahadeva in a former life, was granted celestial boons, which he dearly cherished. The story ends

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<sup>1083</sup> Note, following his misperception of the battlefield, his mis-reasoning of the nature of his defeat, he stops, recognizes the great ontological character, then seeks instruction (*śādhi*). Vāyasa corrects his understanding with the same ontological/co-missional model.

<sup>1084</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 481-483.

<sup>1085</sup> Dutt, M.N., *Mahabharata*, vol. 5, 711.

<sup>1086</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 483. See also, Dutt, vol. 5, 711.

<sup>1087</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 483.

with a call to worship Kesava (Kṛṣṇa) because, as Dutt translates, Kesava “obtained the highest object in the world, viz., Sthānu or Mahadeva.”<sup>1088</sup>

Aśvatthāmās’s answer is simple. You may be great, born out of Rudra’s asceticism, but you are not Nara and Nārāyaṇa great. There is no comparison of you to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Upon hearing Arjuna’s and Kṛṣṇa’s unique ontology, Aśvatthāmās is content and filled with joy, “having his soul under complete control,” and he honors Rudra and then leaves the battlefield with higher regard for Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1089</sup>

As the day ends with the Kurus led off the field by Aśvatthāmās to retire for the night, the scene shifts to Arjuna as Vāyasa now wanders his way (a parallel to Aśvatthāmās’ encounter). Having met the sage, Arjuna quickly asked for the identity of the “marvelous male soul” (*āścaryam ātmano*) slaying his enemies before him.<sup>1090</sup> McGrath also refers to this scene as he closes out his discussion of Arjuna’s combat in the *Droṇa Parvan*. He explains that the mysterious being is *mahātmānam īśānaṃ* (v11), the “great god Śiva.”<sup>1091</sup> Readers and hearers would have “once again” understood that it was this pair (Śiva and Indra) who sustained Arjuna’s “warrior dynamism,” establishing the “basis of his heroic identity.”<sup>1092</sup>

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<sup>1088</sup> Dutt, *Mahabharata*, vol. 5, 711. Ganguli does not include Sthānu, and he has a longer explanation of why Kesava should be worshiped in all modes.

<sup>1089</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CCI, 483.

<sup>1090</sup> Arjuna will later describe Kṛṣṇa’s *rūpamaiśvaraṃ* as *āścaryam* in *Bg* 11.11.

<sup>1091</sup> See footnote where McGrath refers to *ślokas* 9-106 and the history of scribal insertions at the end of *parvans* as representative of a later literate epoch. See also, *mahātmānam īśānaṃ* (v11, 14, 40, 66, 70, 91, 99).

<sup>1092</sup> McGrath, *Arjuna Pāṇḍavā*, 65. He also reiterates that Viṣṇu “plays no part of the epic and certainly not as it concerns Arjuna Pāṇḍava.” However, the *Bg* identified Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa, therefore, the remaining post-*Gītā* epic should be properly understood in light of the *Bg*. For example, Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as Viṣṇu, “I am Viṣṇu” (*ādityānām ahaṃ viṣṇus*, *Bg* 10.21). In response to the *rūpamaiśvaraṃ*, Arjuna address Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu and confides that he is “trembling within his soul” (*tvāṃ pravayathitāntarātmā*, *Bg* 11.24).<sup>1092</sup> In *Bg* 11.30, he describes his ‘Cosmic Form’ as “a terrible all-consuming radiance” (*bhāsas tavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣṇo*). Finally, Arjuna identifies Kṛṣṇa as the “devourer of worlds” (*grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu*, *Bg* 13.16). Therefore, reading the *Mhba* through the perspective of the *Bg*, Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa is active throughout the epic, for Kṛṣṇa is also Nārāyaṇa.

Arjuna observed that the mysterious one advancing before him was raising his trident and felling his foes. It would have appeared to others who could not perceive the figure that Arjuna was slaying them, but as Arjuna admits, he only slew those who had already been slain by this figure blazing like a fire. Vāyasa (excitedly) explains that Arjuna has seen Śaṅkara, the “great god Isva” (*mahātmānam īśānaṃ*, v11), Rudra, Hara, among many others. Though McGrath is correct that Arjuna saw Śiva, the other names within *ślokas* 9-106 are equally relevant. The *Mhba* also lists Sthānu. He explains to Arjuna that the figure is *hari netrāya sthāṇave puruṣāya*, “Hara, eternal Sthānu, v22). In v37, we find *namo 'stu sthāṇave nityaṃ*, “Obeisance to Sthānu, the eternal one.” In v92, we find, *sthitaliṅgaś ca yan nityaṃ tasmāt sthāṇur iti smṛtaḥ* (“on account of his phallic emblem, he is eternally remembered as Sthānu”). Vāyasa ends Arjuna’s scene (as the *Droṇa Parvan* ends) by summing up that Arjuna had seen the god who Kṛṣṇa had shown him in a dream (Mahadeva). The *Droṇa Parvan* affirms that the one who worships this deity will not be conquered and then references the benefit of hearing and reading these combat accounts.

The person who always attentively reads or listens to the recitation of this excellent and auspicious account, appertaining to battle, of the illustrious Deity, and he worships with devotion that illustrious Lord of the universe, obtaineth all the objects of desire, in consequence of the three-eyed God being gratified with him. Go and fight, O son of Kunti, defeat is not for thee, that hast Janardana on thy side for thy adviser and protector.<sup>1093</sup>

As the *Droṇa Parvan* comes to an end, we find the ontology/co-mission model, and Vāyasa is the one who echoes Kṛṣṇa’s command to “Go and fight.” Arjuna must fulfill his commitment because he knows that Sthānu goes before him in battle. Sthānu does in the *Droṇa Parvan* what Kṛṣṇa promised in the *Bg*. Sthānu does what Hara-Śaṅkara did in the *Adhi Parvan*, but this time it is not an ascetic venture on the mountain slopes. Sthānu does so at the height of the war. But the lesson

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<sup>1093</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 485-491.



in *Bg* 11.34 or *Droṇa Parvan* CCI is not a new concept. Arjuna learned this lesson 13 years earlier when Hara-Śaṅkara's arrows pierced and killed the boar though it appeared to Arjuna that he made the kill. Arjuna's ultimate *śādhī* is that his combat is predicated upon the ontology and combat-actions of Sthānu, and Sthānu is Kṛṣṇa.

### Summary

The highly repeated variations of  $\sqrt{sthā}$  were not by accident. The variants are associated with Kṛṣṇa's ontology, men deployed and ready for battle, and the correct mental attitude in combat. Verbalizing the sound *-stha* or *-sthi* would remain in one's mind and then connect the ontological and missional associations with Kṛṣṇa's imperatives ( $\sqrt{sthā}$ ). But, they would have especially done so when one heard the mnemonic connection to Sthānu fulfilling what Kṛṣṇa promised. It is not new content. The context has changed, but the message is the same for the struggling but faithful friend and devotee. Arjuna is not the ideal *kṣatriya*, but he is *the* model. In the end, the *śādhī* that mattered the most was understanding that one had Janārdana on their side as a counselor and protector. Therefore, having been re-ordered to combat-readiness, Arjuna will be encouraged and enabled to remain combat effective because of who Kṛṣṇa is when he is in the form of Sthānu and what Sthānu does (slay the Kurus) because he a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. To fulfill Kṛṣṇa's command to stand up is to fight and kill because one has seen Sthānu before them. In the next chapter, I will examine how Arjuna struggled to remain combat ready and effective because as powerful as Kṛṣṇa's *śādhī* is, it does not inoculate a *kṣatriya* from the nonphysical combat traumas of *karmaṇighora*.

## Chapter 8

### *Dharmakṣeṣṭra-Kurukṣetra: The Impact of Karmaṇighora upon Arjuna's Commitment*

#### Introduction

I have shown in the previous two chapters how the imperatives *pra/pāśya*, *titikṣasva*, and *viddhi* structured Kṛṣṇa's *śādhī*. However, his restoration to combat readiness was not complete until he took action. I suggested that the variants of the root  $\sqrt{sthā}$  ("stand") functioned as a mnemonic device, forming a *dharma*-collage that infused the meaning of the imperative (*tasmād uttiṣṭha*). The ultimate "correction" (*śādhī*) is understanding the significance of Kṛṣṇa's presence when you are fulfilling your *dharma* dictated, caste required, co-mission. In the *Bg*, ultimate *śādhī* is the experience of Kṛṣṇa's *rūpamaiśvara*; in the war books, it is seeing the god Sthānu before him doing what Kṛṣṇa promised he would do in the *Bg*. This chapter will provide examples of the impact of "violent, gory combat" (*karmaṇighora*) on *kṣatriyas* who appear to be prepared and ready for combat.

After the dialogue, Arjuna presents himself as reordered, heroic, and forward-looking. Through their "sacred conversation," Kṛṣṇa adequately prepared Arjuna for the onslaught, but his final declaration of obedience does not guarantee a consistently faithful *dharma* response (*Bg* 18.73).<sup>1094</sup> The horrific experience of "violent, gory combat" (*karmaṇighora*) resulted in his fluctuation from a state of *a-dharma* disorder to a corrected state of *dharma* combat readiness and effectiveness. Yet, though he falters, there is a difference between his original crisis and what appears to be short struggles with grief, doubt, sorrow, rage, and indecision. The difference is that

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<sup>1094</sup> See *Bg* 18.70, "our sacred conversation," *dharmyaṃ saṁvādam āvayos*.

the post-*Gītā* Arjuna can overcome his ‘demons’ *because* of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī*. Hence, the significance of this chapter is that though *śādhī* prepared Arjuna for war, which was his specific work, *śādhī* did not insulate Arjuna (any *kṣatriya*) from nonphysical combat trauma, which was the consequence of *karmanīghora*. Consequently, the *Mhba* portrays Arjuna *again and again* as a devotee and friend who must be re-ordered by Kṛṣṇa (others).

### 8.1 General Examples: Armies, Aswatthaman, Karna, Suyodhana, Duhshasana, Shakuni Duryodhana, Satyaki, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gandhari, Droṇa

Arjuna’s experience is not unique. *Kṣatriyas* struggle with the impact of *karmanīghora*. As a body of “kshatriya literature,”<sup>1095</sup> I have presented vivid examples of *karmanīghora* from the war (*cf.* Ch. 4). As previously stated, the depictions of the host are more often positive than negative. For example, the Pāṇḍavās rushed upon Droṇa in complete control of their senses.<sup>1096</sup> This example is an insight into their heroism and devotion, for they would have expected themselves to die at the hands of Droṇa. Yet, many times, they share the same characteristics as the heroes. Often, men can no longer stand before great men like Arjuna. For example, men lost the joy of battle and became “cheerless.”<sup>1097</sup> In the *Droṇa Parvan*, after seeing Dhṛṣṭadyumna behead Droṇa, the Kuru army disintegrated and appeared lifeless.<sup>1098</sup> In *Karna Parvan* 1, having witnessed the fall of Droṇa, the nobility of the Kaurava army returned to their camp, but they could not sleep well on account of recalling the carnage inflicted on the Pāṇḍavās. Four of those great men, Karna, Suyodhana, Duhshasana, and Shakuni, gathered together and spent a sleepless night

<sup>1095</sup> McGrath, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahabharata* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2011), 10.

<sup>1096</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 433-434.

<sup>1097</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXX, 392; *Droṇa Karna Parvan*, 1.

<sup>1098</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCIII, 453

in Duryodhana’s tent grieving and regretting the rigged game of dice, and especially, the shaming of Draupadi, which Ganguli translates “filled” their hearts with “anxiety.”<sup>1099</sup>

In one of many occurrences, the wicked Duryodhana “wrathfully” accuses Droṇa and Karna of fighting with deference toward the Pāṇḍavās.<sup>1100</sup> Of course, being great men, one expects them to fight with single-minded indifference to the fruits of combat, including nonphysical combat trauma. Still, his accusation cuts to their hearts because they have agreed to fight with the Kurus even though they still harbor affection from life-long friendships with the Pāṇḍus. In other cases, great heroes mirror their routed armies, like Aswatthaman, who threw down his bow and fled with fear, proclaiming, “Curse. Curse. Everything is untrue ...”<sup>1101</sup> At another time, Karna encouraged Duryodhana to resist being dominated by grief and sorrow, for they have hope as long as he is alive and leading the army.<sup>1102</sup>

In some moments, brave heroes like Sātyaki repeatedly disregard risks and certain harm.<sup>1103</sup> In one instance, Sātyaki replaced Arjuna, who appeared to have retreated before Droṇa (*et al.*), and in his absence, he vowed to King Yudhiṣṭhira to command the army and not fear their enemies.<sup>1104</sup> However, he, whose name is inseparable from the *sattva guṇas* (*sat-yaki*), does not escape the negative impact of the *guṇas* of *karmanighora*. In one instance, an intense rage filled

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<sup>1099</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 1, 1.

<sup>1100</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXII, 396

<sup>1101</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXC VII, 460-461; CC, 480. However, Arjuna states Dhristayuma will not survive because *Aśvatthāmā* is filled with rage. See *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXV, 430

<sup>1102</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, 359, CLVIII, 366. See also the response of losing a son, CLXX, 392.

<sup>1103</sup> It is no coincidence that the root word of Sātyaki is *sat* (truth). His name describes one who is known for responding to the *guṇas* of truth.

<sup>1104</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXI, 228-231. Prior to his advance, he seeks permission from King, Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma. He vows to follow in the ruts of Arjuna’s chariot. There is an element that Arjuna represents all *kṣatriyas* because they all fear ‘cowardice’ on account of his possible retreat. I infer from this scene that the *Mhba* presents Sātyaki as the model *kṣatriya* king, even though he is not a king. For instance, absolutely confident in his might, he fully commits himself but also performs the necessary religious rites. Having done so, seeking blessing (the king touches him on his head), he is showered with praise and perfumes, other signs of great respect.

Sātyaki; in another example, he lost control of his ability to think and respond.<sup>1105</sup> Others experience the same phenomenon. For example, the great Droṇa becomes motivated by wrath,<sup>1106</sup> in another scene, he alone among his exhausted, terrified, and disoriented men can stand and produce fear in Arjuna’s army.<sup>1107</sup>

*Karmaṇīghora* extended beyond those who participated in the battle. For example, even though Dhṛtarāṣṭra requested to merely hear the narration of the fight because he could not bear to see the carnage, hearing the accounts still led him to desire death over life.<sup>1108</sup> In addition, his queen, Gandhari, received a gift of “divine vision” from Vyāsa, enabling her to view the battle and the slaying of Duryodhana. Like most mothers, like any mother, she deeply mourned for her eldest and greatest son.<sup>1109</sup> Her lament continued with a narration of grief and sorrow while naming brothers, sons, and husbands who fell and the women who must emotionally process the realities of war.<sup>1110</sup> In another scene of a mother mourning, Subhadra labored to accept Kṛṣṇa’s words of consolation regarding the death of her son, protected by a great host of *kṣatriyas*. However, she eventually embraced the will of the “Destroyer” (Kṛṣṇa, see *Bg* 11.19, 24, 25, 27-30, 32)<sup>1111</sup>, who allowed his death, finally finding consolation in the fact that he received the benefits of a proper *kṣatriya* death.<sup>1112</sup> In other words, the impact of *karmaṇīghora* reaches far beyond Kurukṣetra. In

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<sup>1105</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 191.

<sup>1106</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXV, 430

<sup>1107</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVII, 436.

<sup>1108</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 9.

<sup>1109</sup> McGrath, Kevin, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahabharata*, 17. So also, for example, as a witness to the events of *Kurukṣetra*, having entered and returned from the battle, Sañjaya sees by way of a function of divine sight “in his mind.” See *manasa*. McGrath, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahabharata*, 14.

<sup>1110</sup> McGrath, Kevin, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahabharata*, 17.

<sup>1111</sup> In the vision of the Cosmic Form in *Bg* 11.25, Arjuna sees Kṛṣṇa’s many “faces” (*mukhāni*) “glowing like the fires of universal destruction” (*dr̥ṣṭvaiva kālānalasaṃnibhāni*), literally translated as “having seen the time-fires”.

<sup>1112</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVIII, 151-152.

upcoming sections 8.1.1-8.1.3, I examine the effect of *karmanīghora* upon Yudhiṣṭhira, who should be the shining example of *dharma*.

### 8.1.1 Immediate Impact of *Karmanīghora* upon King Yudhiṣṭhira

Yudhiṣṭhira did not escape the trauma of combat. Many times over, the *Mhba* implies a limit to his indifference. In an ironic twist of fate, Yudhiṣṭhira is continually portrayed as deeply traumatized throughout the war.<sup>1113</sup> Even though he is known as ‘The Dharma King,’ he struggled with sorrow, guilt, and regret, all of which motivated him to contemplate abdicating his throne for a life of extreme renouncement as an ascetic in the forest. I cite the following episodes.

Sañjaya recounts an interchange between Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhīṣma Parvan*.<sup>1114</sup> It is the end of the first day, and Bhīṣma is slaughtering the Pāṇḍu armies. Despair spread through the ranks. At that moment, Yudhiṣṭhira suffered a crisis of leadership, purpose, and identity. He quickly questioned his intent and commitment to restoring himself to his kingdom, which was an implicit questioning of Kṛṣṇa’s ultimate goal.<sup>1115</sup> Having surveyed what appears to be an invincible host led by their grandsire, Bhīṣma, and their preceptor, Droṇa, dread overcomes the righteous king. At that crucial moment, he began a downward spiral conceding defeat and describing his interior state as a man without a boat sinking into the immeasurable depths of the ocean. Like Arjuna’s crisis, the emotions of guilt, sorrow, and regret express the phenomena of momentarily misperceiving the battlefield and wrongly reasoning the outcome.

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<sup>1113</sup> The king struggles with grief, shame, and culpability to the very end of his life.

<sup>1114</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, L, 125-128.

<sup>1115</sup> Questioning his intentions (greed, covetousness) will be emphasized at the conclusion of the war. Interestingly, reasoning is the same condemnation of the Duryodhana (greed) which *The Mhba* repeatedly vilifies. More importantly, Arjuna questioned his/their motivations. See *Bg* 1.37ff.

Yudhiṣṭhira (above all) should not have lost hope even as he saw the carnage, for he knew despite the *dharma*-conditions of the *Kali Yuga* that the duo of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa assured victory. Borrowing our language, Yudhiṣṭhira became disordered. He is far from Kṛṣṇa’s command in *Bg* 2.14, “Endure [with patient maturity],”<sup>1116</sup> and he is far from his initial actions when he removed his armor, discarded his weapons, and confidently strode across the Kuru lines seeking Bhīṣma’s pre-war blessing. Following the chronology, the nonphysical trauma of *karmanighora* is so powerful that the greatest king became disordered and combat ineffective in a matter of hours. It was the faculties of his *guṇa-karma* perception and reasoning that became unreliable. Having seen the destruction, he declared to Kṛṣṇa that the current path was the direct result of the “weakness of my understanding,” which allowed Bhīṣma to become their enemy.<sup>1117</sup> Reminiscent of Arjuna’s reasoning in *Bg* 2.1, Yudhiṣṭhira was similarly “possessed by sorrow” (*kṛpayāviṣṭam*). Yudhiṣṭhira then decided that he would retreat to the forest to escape his kingly responsibilities. Reminiscent of Arjuna’s crisis, Yudhiṣṭhira claims, “To live there is preferable to devoting these lords of earth to Death in the form of Bhīṣma.”<sup>1118</sup> Having affirmed the preciousness of life and his commitment to becoming a wandering ascetic in the forest, he further declares, “I will not, Oh Kesava, cause these friends of mine to be slain.” In other words, he no longer desires to fulfill his *dharma*-dictated, caste-directed, pre-war commitment; he wants to perform the duty of a different caste (see *Bg* 1.46; 2.5).<sup>1119</sup>

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<sup>1116</sup> See Ch. 6.2.

<sup>1117</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, L, 125-128.

<sup>1118</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, L, 125.

<sup>1119</sup> Arjuna would rather die an ignoble, illicit death at the hands of his enemy (*Bg* 1.45), or live a life of a begger (*Bg* 2.5).

Like Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira is not *so* disordered that he cannot seek Kṛṣṇa for counsel (*sadhī*).<sup>1120</sup> In this scene, he immediately seeks wisdom for their strategy, which Kṛṣṇa quickly provides. Accounts such as this further mirror Arjuna’s crisis. In all these accounts, I infer a danger and a warning for Yudhiṣṭhira if he continues to descend the dark rajasic/tamasic path. Kṛṣṇa gave Arjuna a similar warning in *Bg* 14.15, 18. The parallels continue.

For example, both men visually perceived their enemies. Both men grieved. Both declare that a different caste duty is preferable to their own requirements. Both claim their intention not to engage in combat. Arjuna will not fight and kill; Yudhiṣṭhira will not send his brothers, friends, and allies to fight and be killed. Both men are traumatized to the point that they cannot remember established truths, e.g., the immutable *ātman* cannot be slain, bodies are merely old clothes to be thrown to the ground at the moment of death, all those who are killed in action have already been destined to be killed by the supreme agent, Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1121</sup> Both were instructed not to grieve despite what they had seen and experienced. Finally, Kṛṣṇa affirmed to both men that he acts in their favor. Two more accounts are especially relevant. Even though Yudhiṣṭhira is the king of the Pāṇḍavās, it appears that a powerful nonphysical phenomenon is impacting his ability to perceive and reason and, therefore, influencing the *guṇas* toward *a-dharma karma*.

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<sup>1120</sup> In this he is contrasted to Arjuna. The former appears to struggle while the former was clearly emotionally and physiologically incapacitated.

<sup>1121</sup> I say, “also revealed” because Arjuna has ontological understanding from Kṛṣṇa prior to the *Bg*. When Kṛṣṇa responds the first time to Arjuna’s crisis, there is no ontological discussion. He commands him because he knows that Arjuna knows his ontology and theology. In his second response, his *sadhī* presumes prior knowledge as well, but goes more deeply as the *Bg* progresses.



### 8.1.2 Yudhiṣṭhira Discerns Arjuna's Struggle

Yudhiṣṭhira found a measure of respite from his grief when he requested Dhṛishtadyumna to command his forces, a command that the great *kṣatriya* wholeheartedly embraced. The example of Dhṛishtadyumna's immediate response contrasts Arjuna's initial unwillingness and his present vacillation. Having witnessed Arjuna's less than convincing combat, Yudhiṣṭhira conceded, "I see that he [Arjuna] is an indifferent spectator in this battle."<sup>1122</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira came to this conclusion because Arjuna appeared to concede the battlefield in what *he* perceived as an inevitable defeat.<sup>1123</sup> To lesser men, Arjuna's performance may have appeared to have been a total commitment to the cause, certainly beyond their skill. After all, he was slaying lesser *kṣatriyas* by the thousands. However, the *Mhba* does not positively portray his slaying of those lesser *kṣatriyas*, for he did so only out of his unwillingness to engage Bhīṣma with his full might. Yudhiṣṭhira quickly perceived the nature of Arjuna, exacerbating his beleaguered state. While Arjuna is as equally proficient as Bhīṣma and Droṇa in all weapons (physical & celestial), Yudhiṣṭhira described Arjuna as "beholding us consumed by Bhīṣma and the high-souled Droṇa, looking indifferently on us." Although he was fighting and killing as ordered by Kṛṣṇa (*Bg* 11.33-34), it was as if he no longer desired victory (*Bg* 1.32). It was as if he had returned to his initial misperception of the nature of combat, no longer willing to fight and kill the great men that only he could fight and kill (*cf.* *Bg* 1.25, 36-37; 2.4). According to Yudhiṣṭhira's determination, even as he was also momentarily dominated by the *guṇas* by the end of the first day, he still rightly perceived the nature of Arjuna's combat and, in my terms, discerned that the nonphysical combat trauma from *karmaṇighora* was so traumatic that the reordered Arjuna had become disordered and combat ineffective.<sup>1124</sup>

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<sup>1122</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, L, 125. It appeared to the king and others that Arjuna did not truly desire victory.

<sup>1123</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLIX, 124.

<sup>1124</sup>The *Mhba* repeatedly combines the leadership or lack of leadership with the response of their respective armies. Therefore, it is never the prowess of a single hero, but a single hero inspiring or failing his men.

This story scandalizes Arjuna, for his brother was forced to ask Kṛṣṇa for a suitable replacement to lead his army (Dhrishtadyumna). Soon after, Arjuna recovered a measure of his courage, for he blew his great conch with his brothers and Kṛṣṇ and *followed* Dhrishtadyumna into battle. Arjuna's reengagement encouraged the ranks of *kṣatriyas*. However, the *Mhba* may once again be scandalizing the hope of the Pāṇḍus because he should be leading, not following a gallant but lesser man.<sup>1125</sup> Finally, before the *Mhba* delves into another detailed account of a battle, we find a reinvigorated Yudhiṣṭhira and a recommitted Arjuna. Having rejoined the fight, the latter reiterated his restored pre-war commitment, "Proceed to the place where the grandsire is. O you of Vrishni's race, it is evident that this Bhishma, with wrath excited, will annihilate ... my host."<sup>1126</sup>

While this episode focuses on how Yudhiṣṭhira struggled, he did so because Arjuna struggled. Therefore, whereas *karmaṇighora* was the cause of Arjuna vacating the battlefield, his combat experience and action predicate his recommitment. In other words, Arjuna's commitment increased as he fought. Therefore, though *karmaṇighora* is negative, it may also lead to remembering and regaining courage and a sense of co-mission.<sup>1127</sup> This account on the first day of the war is not the only account of uncertainty.<sup>1128</sup> The nonphysical impact of the war followed Yudhiṣṭhira to the very end. His continued inability to return to indifference appeared to align with Wilson's observation, "The survivor faces the reality of how emotionally infused traumatic

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<sup>1125</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LI, 128.

<sup>1126</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LII, 129.

<sup>1127</sup> The positive influence of *karmaṇighora* is consistent with the common, positive experience observed in contemporary veterans returning to their former society and living life enhanced by their combat-growth.

<sup>1128</sup> See also Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVII-CVIII, 267-271. Yudhiṣṭhira is once again distraught. He blames his understanding, he grieves like one drowning in an ocean, it would be better for him to retreat to the forest, he no longer desires to fight for his kingdom.

exposure has altered their sense of well-being, values, and views of life.”<sup>1129</sup> I cite one more example.

### 8.1.3 Lasting Impact of *Karmañighora* upon Yudhiṣṭhira

Yudhiṣṭhira continued to struggle with grief and regret. For example, as the battle progressed, Yudhiṣṭhira made *a-dharma* declarations like, “This heavy grief, however, is always sitting in my heart, *viz.*, that through covetousness I have caused this dreadful carnage of kinsmen.”<sup>1130</sup> Yet, the *Mhba* decisively places the blame upon Duryodhana and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Sañjaya plainly states that Dhṛtarāṣṭra must suffer through the ramifications of Duryodhana’s refusal to seek peace, e.g., the deaths of his 100 sons. He then instructs the blind king that he should not grieve because he is ultimately the cause of their death.<sup>1131</sup> Dhṛtarāṣṭra places the blame on Duryodhana (and his deceitful counsel of Duhsasana, Karna),<sup>1132</sup> and Kṛṣṇa names him the “root of all wrongs,”<sup>1133</sup> though he assigns Dhṛtarāṣṭra to be the “destroyer of his own race.”<sup>1134</sup>

Yudhiṣṭhira continues to lapse from *dharma* to *a-dharma* perception and reasoning. For example, later in *Santi Parvan* VII, having rejected his intention and all actions, he confessed, “grief is stupefying me.”<sup>1135</sup> In a post-war scene from the *Santi Parvan*, the Pāṇḍu’s have finished observing a month of required mourning by remaining on the banks of the Bhagirathi river,

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<sup>1129</sup> Wilson, John P., ed., *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>1130</sup> Ganguli, *Santi Parvan*, I, 1. Perhaps, this is another reason the *Santi Parvan* was added later to the *Mhba* and accepted as a central component of the epic.

<sup>1131</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXXXVI, 293.

<sup>1132</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXV, 166.

<sup>1133</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CI, 205.

<sup>1134</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XLIX, 107.

<sup>1135</sup> See Ganguli, *Santi Parvan*, VII, 11, for the comprehensive lament continuing beyond I-XXII. His preoccupation for the killing of Karna by Arjuna predates the long dialogue between the king, Arjuna, Bhima, Drapaudi, others.

postponing their triumphant entrance of the city of the Kurus.<sup>1136</sup> The *Mhba* records that many wise and devout men came to offer their condolences, all of whom mourned the consequences of the war.<sup>1137</sup> Amazingly, grieving with them was the usurper, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra.<sup>1138</sup> Eventually, Narada complimented the king for his victory, which the great *rishi* contributes to the might of his army and the blessings and purposes of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1139</sup>

Narada (and other *rishis*) were then surprised at what they saw. The victorious king was not behaving like one who had just regained his kingdom. In contrast, he appeared entrenched in the *a-dharma* of his *guṇa* attachment to post-combat emotions (grief, regret, guilt). Ganguli translates Narada’s query, “Having obtained this prosperity, I hope grief does not still afflict you.” Narada is a wise, devout man. He knows Yudhiṣṭhira should not be overcome with grief, having fulfilled the protocols for mourning. In other words, Yudhiṣṭhira is not patiently enduring the fleeting sensations/emotions by remaining indifferent to his nonphysical, postcombat trauma. There appears to be a lasting, debilitating impact upon his integrated, interior life. This scene illustrates that the negative effect of *karmaṇighora* remained despite its passing nature (“I hope [it] does not still afflict you”), despite a considerable passing of time, and despite an established corporate *kṣatriya* ritual. In addition, the traumas are outlasting the daily morning rituals allowing *kṣatriyas* to process and move on from the previous day.<sup>1140</sup> Patiently enduring nonphysical combat trauma is not about the experiences immediately in and following *karmaṇighora*;

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<sup>1136</sup> See Ganguli, *Santi Parvan*, I-IX. It is a diverse group of friends, kin, the Pāṇḍu brothers, Vidura, the Bharata wives and servants, and the vanquished Kuru king, Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

<sup>1137</sup> The text lists learned men, ascetics, rishis, disciples, Brahmanas. The text highlights Vyāsa, Narada, Devala, Devasthana, and Kanva.

<sup>1138</sup> I infer the importance of community and the possibility of reconciliation of families torn apart from war. There shared identity as *kṣatriyas* is as important as their familial relationships.

<sup>1139</sup> Immediately prior to the war, men of both sides affirm that what happens in the battle will happen according to the providence of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>1140</sup> The *Mhba* describes the Kuru nobility completing morning rituals as a means of moving beyond their grief over what they had done to their enemies. See Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 1.

endurance is about continuing to address them in the days, months, and years to follow.<sup>1141</sup> The war is over, and the traumatic influence on the *guṇa-karma* faculty to rightly perceive the nature of the combat remains.

Yudhiṣṭhira's ongoing struggle is an example of how the *guṇas* dominated the most righteous of *kṣatriyas*. Here, we turn our attention to Arjuna's struggles to endure the negative impact of *karmanighora*. The epic depicts Arjuna in several accounts attempting to reorder his brother to their *dharma*-determined, caste-dictated commitment. Ironically, his epistemological rebuke to his brother will exemplify the rebuke of his vacillation: "Do not, O bull among Kshatriyas, grieve thus for what is past. ... That which has happened was ordained to happen. Destiny, Oh tiger among kings, is incapable of being resisted."<sup>1142</sup> The remainder of the chapter recounts examples of Arjuna's combat experience.

## 8.2 Specific Examples: Arjuna

*Karmanighora* greatly impacted Arjuna's combat readiness and effectiveness. Arjuna is unique because he was the Bg's sole audience and was famed far and wide as invincible when joined with Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1143</sup> This subsection will focus on how Arjuna vacillated from combat readiness, effectiveness, disorder, and back to readiness. It will show how multiple heroes employ a version of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhī* resulting in a recommitment to fulfill their pre-war promise.

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<sup>1141</sup> There is a cost to the splendor, victory, wealth, and righteousness (see Sañjaya's statement *Bg* 18.78).

<sup>1142</sup> Ganguli, *Santi Parvan*, XXII, 39-40.

<sup>1143</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLVII, for one of many references to the invincibility of "The Two Kṛṣṇa."

### 8.2.1 Karna Parvan, XCI: Arjuna and Sattva

The association of Arjuna and the *sattva guṇas* is a reoccurring theme throughout the *Mhba*.<sup>1144</sup> Arjuna is more than simply Bhīma’s description, “like the Destroyer.”<sup>1145</sup> The epic elevates Arjuna above the status of a man of great deeds. He, like no other, is connected to Kṛṣṇa’s purposes. The formidable Karna speaks of Arjuna as “firm in truth.”<sup>1146</sup> In the *Droṇa Parvan*, Sañjaya describes him checking his preceptor Droṇa as one who is “firmly devoted to truth ... desirous of accomplishing his vow.”<sup>1147</sup> He can confidently (and competently) vouchsafe the protection of Yudhiṣṭhira, but at the same time, the *sattvas* enable him to restrain himself in the face of vanquished foes.<sup>1148</sup> For example, in one account of the heat of battle, he adheres to the rules of engagement by not striking down unarmed, wounded, or retreating *kṣatriyas* who had lost the will to fight.<sup>1149</sup> Furthermore, allies and enemies see the difference, for they recognize his return to combat effectiveness in the *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LX. When he is acting upon the *sattvas*, he can correct Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and even Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1150</sup>

### 8.2.2 The Significance of A Combat Ready Arjuna

The *Mhba* presents Arjuna as the hero of Kurukṣetra. His presence overshadowed all.<sup>1151</sup> For example, when sufficiently motivated to avenge his son’s illicit death, he showed no qualms

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<sup>1144</sup> So also, Satyaki, whom Yudhiṣṭhira describes as “firmly devoted to truth,” *Droṇa Parvan*, CIX.

<sup>1145</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LV. This is a very common appellation given to great heroes. It is a reference to Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>1146</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, XXXVII.

<sup>1147</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, XCI.

<sup>1148</sup> See Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XIII for one of many vows to protect his brother. One of many examples, kings vacated the field because they were unable to advance against Arjuna (Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LV). When committed, he is invincible (Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVIII). A master of his warcraft, he is competent in all types of weapons (*Bhīṣma Parvan*, CXIII). When committed, he fights with the intent to annihilate his foes (Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLV; XLIX; LVIII; LXXXVI).

<sup>1149</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XXX.

<sup>1150</sup> Kṛṣṇa see’s through Arjuna’s response to his brother’s insult, exposing Arjuna’s hypocrisy, which causes Arjuna to repent, necessitating an interesting battlefield compromise (as a meditator). See Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LX.

<sup>1151</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XIX. Arjuna has the god Hanuman on his standard.

about killing Jayadratha (others). He vowed, “Blood shall flow (in torrents) from the breasts of fallen men and elephants and steeds, split open by whetted shafts failing fast upon them!”<sup>1152</sup> His readiness further predicated how the *Mhba* associated his commitment and unique identity with Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu, e.g., referrals to the “all-consuming death.”<sup>1153</sup> As expected, the combination of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa made Yudhiṣṭhira’s army unconquerable.<sup>1154</sup> Related to his readiness, he had a unique *dharma* responsibility, but he portrayed himself as a fellow participant in the context of the entire military. Most often, one finds him leading men, the protector of the army, or the only one able to withstand Bhīma, Droṇa, and Karna. As such, he had a direct impact on both armies. When he committed to the fight, his men found courage, gods sang praises, men rejoiced, the heavens manifested their approval, and his enemies became distressed.<sup>1155</sup>

However, read from the perspective of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*, his participation is also associated with negative consequences. For example, having sat upon his chariot because of a withering duel, the Kurus cheered what they believed to be his defeat.<sup>1156</sup> Correspondingly, his army lost its heart. All of the above examples had implications in the war, for Kurukṣetra is an account of strategies and counterstrategies, rehearsed and highly sophisticated tactics.<sup>1157</sup> Ganguli later notes that Arjuna and Bhīma were to appear (and function) in the war as a singular “force” advancing toward

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<sup>1152</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVI, 147. See also, *Karna*, XVI.

<sup>1153</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXV, XC. In *Bg* 11.24, 30, having seen the rumpamaiṣvara, Arjuna identifies Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu.

<sup>1154</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XX. There are so many references to their invincibility that only one will suffice.

<sup>1155</sup> See Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLIII. In *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLIX, the Kurus are described as floundering ships on the ocean caught in a tempest.

<sup>1156</sup> See Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXXXVIII.

<sup>1157</sup> The *Mhba* records strategic battle formations. McGrath notes Sañjaya’s knowledge of arms, McGrath, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahābhārata*, 48.

the Kurus and defending Yudhiṣṭhira’s army.<sup>1158</sup> This they did, but the nonphysical trauma via the *guṇas* of *karmanighora* made sustaining that cooperation difficult.<sup>1159</sup>

### 8.2.3 *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XXI-XXIII: Arjuna Re-orders Yudhiṣṭhira to Combat Readiness

There is an emphasis on Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira, the latter looking to his younger brother for refuge. In contrast to his former state of crisis, we see the opposite. For example, the combat-ready Arjuna would later instruct Kṛṣṇa to drive his chariot into the heat of battle to save Yudhiṣṭhira.<sup>1160</sup> In an earlier example in the war, the traumatized Yudhiṣṭhira, having seen the Kurus advancing unchecked, was described as losing all facial color and deep in grief.<sup>1161</sup> However, the scene is not as dire as it would first seem. The vast Kuru host was massing, but Sañjaya balances the view by noting that even though they are fewer, they too appear “invincible” (*duṣpradhṛṣyāṃ*) because *yasyā netārau keśavaś cārjunaś ca*, “both *keśavaś* (Kṛṣṇa) and Arjuna are leading.”<sup>1162</sup>

Having seen Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s formidable battle formations, the king was “overcome with grief” (*viṣādam*; *viṣaṅgam*), foreseeing no victory.<sup>1163</sup> He was in a state of “mental grief-driven despair” (*viṣaṅgamanas*).<sup>1164</sup> In this situation, Arjuna appears to be battle-ready, “liberated from despair” (*viṣaṅgmukhas*).<sup>1165</sup> Arjuna immediately responded by reminding his brother how a vastly outnumbered force may gain victory in the face of overwhelming numbers. He began with the

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<sup>1158</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XLIX.

<sup>1159</sup> In one account, Bhīma admonishes Arjuna for his half-hearted commitment. For example, see Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan* CLXXXVI, where Bhīma reminds Arjuna that he is inflicting harm upon his allies if he does not wholeheartedly commit to the fight. As a consequence, Arjuna rejoins the fight.

<sup>1160</sup> See Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, 21.

<sup>1161</sup> See Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XXI.

<sup>1162</sup> See Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 20, 20.

<sup>1163</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 21.1; 21.6.

<sup>1164</sup> For the mfn *viṣaṅgamanas*, see the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; see Monier-Williams, 996.

<sup>1165</sup> For the mfn *viṣaṅgmukhas*, see the *Rāmāyaṇa*; see see Monier-Williams, 996.



account of the heavenly war against the *Asuras*. The primal “Grandfather” counseled Indra (while in battle) and his celestial army with a story he would have known, also known by Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Narada. Victory is not through the might of arms but the content of their character. Having listed characteristics and how “righteousness” (*dharma*) is with the humble, discerning, and indifferent *kṣatriyas*, he reminds him of the ancient truth also recalled by Indra long before,

- (11) . . . *yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*  
 (12) *evaṃ rājan vijānīhi dhruvo 'smākaṃ raṇe jayaḥ*  
*yathā me nāradaḥ prāha yataḥ kṛṣṇas tato jayaḥ*  
 (13) *guṇabhūto jayaḥ kṛṣṇe pṛṣṭhato 'nveti mādhavam*
- (11) . . . where there is *dharma* (righteousness) there is victory,  
 (12) Because of this, King, remember victory is certain on the battlefield.  
 Nārada spoke this, where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is victory.  
 (13) Victory is Kṛṣṇa’s *guṇa*-nature; It follows behind Mādhavam.<sup>1166</sup>

These are very encouraging words to Yudhiṣṭhira. He recovers, and the scene is set for the *Bg*. The preeminence of Kṛṣṇa and the repetition of *jayas* (“victory”) would have been very calming and reassuring.<sup>1167</sup> The following line in v16 sums up the long speech, “With Kṛṣṇa before us we will conquer” (*anu kṛṣṇaṃ jayemeti*).<sup>1168</sup> Ganguli notes a discrepancy, opting for the Bengal translation of *anu Kṛṣṇa*, “behind Kṛṣṇa,” as opposed to the Bombay translation, “How, O Krishna, shall we conquer?”<sup>1169</sup> He concludes that the meaning is that Kṛṣṇa *leads* them; therefore, the context is not only that the presence of Kṛṣṇa assured victory, but the primary means of victory *is* Kṛṣṇa *as* the vanguard. Even when Kṛṣṇa goes before them into battle as a noncombatant, success falls to the

<sup>1166</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 21.11-13.

<sup>1167</sup> *Jaya* is repeated 8x in *ślokas* 11-17.

<sup>1168</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 21.16.

<sup>1169</sup> See note, 46.2. In Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XXIII, Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to make himself ceremoniously clean and sing a hymn of worship to the god, Durga, who will in turn promise victory. Having done so, Sañjaya declares that the king (anyone) should have no fear of defeat having sung the Durga (to Durga). Consequently, Arjuna picks up Gāṇḍīva, blows his conch, and gods and men rejoice. The army is once again reinvigorated. I infer the *Bg* is supporting *bhaktiyoga* (worship) as a predicating element *jnanakarma yoga*.

men who follow Kṛṣṇa in obedience. Kṣatriyas must see and understand the significance of Kṛṣṇa’s presence with them.<sup>1170</sup> Because of Arjuna’s ability to provide a timely response to Yudhiṣṭhira’s momentary waiver from the truth (*sattya guna*), his brother was restored and reminded again that the *ultimate* promise of victory is Kṛṣṇa.

In this ancient account of Indra, the emphasis is on the greater agent. While *karmanighora* had caused the king to forget the primary agent of combat-effectiveness (Kṛṣṇa) and, therefore, lose hope of victory, the lesser agent (Arjuna) was able (at this moment) to hear and re-order his brother *before* he would soon have *his* crisis! Therefore, he re-ordered Yudhiṣṭhira’s ability to rightly perceive reality *after* he reminded him of the ontological reality of the war (Kṛṣṇa leads them).<sup>1171</sup> At this moment, Arjuna is the ideal because he acted upon his inherent *satva guṇas*, but in two chapters, he will demonstrate that he remains an imperfect model.

#### 8.2.4 *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX: Arjuna, Not fully Committed to Co-Mission

Early in the war, allies and enemies recognized that Arjuna was not fully committed to victory. Despite his attempts, Arjuna struggled to become indifferent to his relationships with *Bhīṣma* (others). He uncharacteristically restrained himself from defeating *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, which infuriated his brothers and Kṛṣṇa. In this scene, Yudhiṣṭhira lost hope and sank into a deep grief state. Arjuna’s reluctance infuriated Kṛṣṇa to the point that he almost initiated the destruction of the universe. His combat ineffectiveness brought broader ramifications, for the *Mhba* repeatedly

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<sup>1170</sup> See Ch. 5.5.1-2. To be *kaśmalam* is to have a quality of spiritual degradation (Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vol. 1., 103). One more note is significance. The “righteousness” of a *kṣatriya* parallels the *jaya* of Kṛṣṇa. This is very illuminating for Arjuna’s later *guṇic* driven state of despair (*viśīdantam*, *Bg* 2.1) and “mental confusion of *dharma* [combat]” (*dharmasamūḍhacetāḥ*, *Bg* 2.7) by the sweeping tides of sorrow (*śokam*, *Bg* 2.8) was spiritually detrimental (*kaśmalam*). Therefore, Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* was a restoration of his spiritual relationship to Kṛṣṇa as a devotee.

<sup>1171</sup> I have documented examples of Arjuna restoring Kṛṣṇa in several account. See Chapter 6. See also Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, L, where Yudhiṣṭhira retreats to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Having comforted and reassured the king, the “Two Kṛṣṇa’s” blow their divine conches, Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LI.

mentions how hundreds of thousands of lesser *kṣatriyas* faithfully gave their all for the cause, often portrayed as innocent actors caught up in the broader drama of the war. Their needless death also infuriated Kṛṣṇa implying Arjuna’s lack of leadership was a heinous *a-dharma* act.

In *Bhīṣma Parvan* LIX, the scene begins with a graphic description of *karmaṇighora*. Sañjaya recorded the material destruction of bodies and the shouts of men in the ebb and flow of the battle. For example, Ganguli translates, “Stay,—Here I stand,—Know this one,—Turn back,—Stand,—I wait for you,—Strike.”<sup>1172</sup> Some, in their final moments, called for friends, kin, and comrades, while others fled away before their opponents who chastised them, “... Come! ... Come here you! Why are you frightened? Where do you go? I stand in battle, do not be afraid.”<sup>1173</sup> The *Mhba* provides an insight into the non-physical impact of *karmaṇighora*. One man says, “Stay,” another, “Here I stand,” but then another, “Turn back.” Having seen Yudhiṣṭhira flee in disarray and having heard their cries, Kṛṣṇa reminded Arjuna of his pre-war commitment (promise),

“The hour is now come, O Partha, which was desired by you. Strike Bhishma, O tiger among men, else, you will lose the senses. O hero, formerly, in the conclave of kings, you had said,—I will slay all the warriors of Dhritarashtra's sons, headed by Bhishma and Droṇa --all in fact, who will fight with me in battle.’ O son of Kunti, O chastiser of foes, make those words of yours true.”<sup>1174</sup>

Upon hearing Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* as a simple reference to his pre-war promise and commitment (*Bg* 2.2-3; *cf.* Ch. 6.7; 8.6), Arjuna heeded his command and returned to the heart of the battle, turning the tide and restoring hope to the Pāṇḍus. His foes also noticed, especially Bhīṣma, who

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<sup>1172</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX. The *Mhba* includes common attributes to the battle (physical *karmaṇighora*), e.g., decapitations, rivers of blood, bloody mires, body and animal parts strewn on the ground, wild animals awaiting a feast of flesh, cosmological reactions in the environment, and references to the dissolution of the universe. The *Mhba* may also convey the fierce suddenness of Bhīṣma’s attack, for the torsos of beheaded men remained standing with weapons in their hands.

<sup>1173</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX, 148.

<sup>1174</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX.

commended his determination and might.<sup>1175</sup> Regarding this scene, Kṛṣṇa had seen the degree of Arjuna’s commitment, and he had seen the needless death of thousands. He had heard their cries. He smelled their mutilated and charred bodies, and he had experienced some of the emotions which affected Arjuna and their armies. For example, Kṛṣṇa’s mind began to doubt their victory, for Bhīṣma could annihilate their troops by the next day.<sup>1176</sup> In response, he rejected Arjuna’s performance as a half-hearted display of force. He did so on several accounts, e.g., when he questioned his prowess and commitment in the *Droṇa Parvan*.<sup>1177</sup>

In the ensuing moments, Kṛṣṇa decided to take control of the situation and became directly involved, having made the contrast between Bhīṣma’s force of arms with the “mildness” of Arjuna’s combat ineffectiveness. On two accounts, Kṛṣṇa noted Arjuna’s unwillingness to win victory. Therefore, he dismounted Arjuna’s chariot, advanced toward Bhīṣma, and declared he would “lighten” Arjuna’s “burden.” Then, we read the following, “As regards Arjuna, though struck in battle with keen shafts, he knows not what he should do, from respect for Bhishma.” Here, Kṛṣṇa recognized the relationship of the nonphysical traumas from *karmanighora* and Arjuna’s ability to approach a deadly confrontation with Bhīṣma as he would any other hero or anonymous *kṣatriya*. Arjuna should have displayed an increased commitment *because* Bhīṣma is wounding him.

In contrast, he could not rightly reason his following *dharma* action because he allowed the *guṇas* to rekindle his life-long bonds of love. As the narration progresses, the *Mhba* records Kṛṣṇa encouraging the armies to fulfill their heroic *kṣatriya* duties. Then he dismounted and in

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<sup>1175</sup> Ganguli translates Bhīṣma’s words, “Excellent, O Partha, O thou of mighty arms, excellent, O son of Pāṇḍu. O Dhananjaya, such a mighty feat is, indeed, worthy of thee. I have been pleased with thee. Fight hard with me son” (*Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX).

<sup>1176</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX, 150.

<sup>1177</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXVII, 411.

beautiful wonder, approached Bhīṣma with his discus, appearing as the “*samvarta* fire” of the dissolution of the universe.<sup>1178</sup>

All is not lost, though. Arjuna regained his senses and forcibly drug Kṛṣṇa to his station. At that moment, Arjuna *again* remembered his pre-war commitment, intervening on behalf of his friend and lord, thus preventing Kṛṣṇa from breaking *his* pre-war vow to remain a noncombatant. Kṛṣṇa returned to his driver’s seat; Arjuna recovered Gandīva, whose twang struck fear in the hearts of the Kurus as it reverberated through their ranks. Arjuna’s return bolstered their spirits, and they re-engaged their opponents with renewed vigor. The final comment of section LIX, as both armies return to camp at nightfall, is a recognition (by all) that only Arjuna could have accomplished such a magnificent victory.

### **8.2.5 *Bhīṣma Parvan*, XCVII: What does it Profit us If we Slay our Family?**

In *Bhīṣma Parvan* XCVII, Arjuna questioned the benefit of killing his cousins, harkening back to his crisis in *Bg* 1.36, “What could be our [possible] joy after killing Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons?” More precisely, Arjuna is restating the same counterargument from *Bg* 2.6 when he assumed the role of representing both Kurus and the Pāṇḍavās, concluding, “We do not know whether it is more preferable that we should conquer or they should conquer.” As the scene unfolded, Arjuna once again faltered in his commitment while he was in battle following Bhīma’s retelling of the death of King Iravat. Hearing this, Arjuna “sighed like a snake” in grief.<sup>1179</sup> Arjuna’s regression to a disordered state quickly devolved to regretting his purpose—lamenting his duty to Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna acknowledged the folly of this war that the wise Vidura foretold. He was not alone. Arjuna cursed

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<sup>1178</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIX. The *Mhba* also describes him appearing as Viṣṇu (when he comes to Arjuna’s aid) and the “Preceptor of the Universe.” Arjuna identifies Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu in *Bg* 11.24, 26.

<sup>1179</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan* XCVII.

the greed on both sides for kingly riches, which had caused the catastrophe,<sup>1180</sup> declaring that a poor man’s death would be preferable to destroying his extended family (and the caste) for Yudhiṣṭhira’s kingdom. He affirmed the consensus that the blame for “exterminating” the *kṣatriya* caste was clearly on the evil scheming of Duryodhana, Sakuni, and Karna (their advisor), but not before he made the statement, “What, O Krishna, shall we gain by slaying our assembled kinsmen?”<sup>1181</sup> He then “censures” himself, knowing that the other *kṣatriyas* will deride him as combat ineffective (see *Bg* 2.2, 34-36). Once again, he has returned to misperceiving the nature of combat and the reality of the war. Because he is not enduring the *guṇas*, he does not see his unique purpose (*svadharma*), his pre-war commitment to restore his brother’s throne and punish the wicked Kurus. He sways back and forth in the flow of *karmaṇighora*, “wavering” (*vikampitum*, *Bg* 2.31) between failing and fulfilling his pre-war commitment through “this sanctioned combat” (*Bg* 2.33).<sup>1182</sup> The *guṇas* have brought him full circle.

However, Arjuna does not have a catastrophic, epistemological collapse. In contrast, though he had allowed himself to be attached to the *rajas* and *tasmatic guṇas*, he deeply grieved for his kin's slaughter (*et al.*). Although at the same time, he was wrong about denouncing his caste-duty, he remained able to rightly reason the inevitable—the war must be fought, and he must win it for the Pāṇḍavās. Once again, he committed himself to ending the conflict through his might alone. Contrary to his crisis, *Bhīṣma Parvan* XCVII portrays a *struggling kṣatriya*. He backslides but does not entirely collapse as in his original episode. He “trembles” or “wavers” in his resolve (*vikampitum*, *Bg* 2.31), but he can perceive and quickly recover his duty.

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<sup>1180</sup> Ganjuli employ the term “fie,” which is no longer in common usage. From the combat-context and development of Arjuna, I replace it with “curse the usefulness.”

<sup>1181</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan* XCVII.

<sup>1182</sup> *imaṃ dhārmyaṃ saṅgrāmaṃ*. I have been employing the term, vacillate, which I use interchangeably with “waiver” (*vikampitum*).

### 8.2.6 *Bhīśma Parvan*, CVII: Vacillation and Reluctance in Arjuna’s Combat

In *Bhīśma Parvan* CVII, Yudhiṣṭhira wavered (again) because of the might of Bhīśma and the ineffectiveness of Arjuna. In this scene, the Parthas scattered in every direction. As the afternoon waned, the intensity of the battle caused men to lose their minds—fathers killed sons, sons killed fathers, friends killed friends.<sup>1183</sup> It was complete disarray. Seeing how the war was trending toward the Kurus, Kṛṣṇa reminded Arjuna of his pre-war commitment. Ganguli translates his call,

“That hour is come, O Partha, which you had hoped for. Strike now, O tiger among men, or you will be deprived of your senses. Formerly, O hero, you said, O Partha, in that conclave of kings in Virata's city, in the presence also of Sañjaya, these words:--'I will slay all the warriors of Dhritarashtra's son, all of them with their followers, including, Bhishma and Droṇa , that would fight with me in battle--O son of Kunti, O chastiser of foes, make those words of yours true. Remembering the duty of a Kshatriya, fight, without any anxiety.’”<sup>1184</sup>

However, at these words, Arjuna ducked his head away in disapproval, retorting,

“To acquire sovereignty with hell in the end, having slain those who should not be slain, or the woes of an exile in the woods,--(these are the alternatives). Which of these should I achieve? Urge the steeds, O Hrishikesa, I will do thy bidding. I will overthrow the Kuru grandsire Bhishma, that invincible warrior.”<sup>1185</sup>

Arjuna once again struggled to remain indifferent to the powerful emotions blurring the best path forward. Kṛṣṇa recognized his continued attachment to familial relations. The *Mhba* intentionally recalls *Bg* 1.35-36, 43-44. In v35, Arjuna declared he “has no desire” to kill the Kurus, who had

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<sup>1183</sup> Ganguli’s translation is that it was as if the men were “compelled by fate.”

<sup>1184</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīśma Parvan*, CVII.

<sup>1185</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīśma Parvan*, CVII.

every intention of killing him.<sup>1186</sup> At this moment, *sadhī* was not an epistemological treatise; it was a quick reminder of his pre-war commitment.

There are several key points. Arjuna continues to fluctuate between the clarity of his declaration in *Bg* 18.73 and the moments when he appeared antagonistic toward Kṛṣṇa. Second, the *Bg* indicates that Arjuna is restored (reordered) based on several statements (e.g., *Bg* 11.1; 18.73). Was he naive in *Bg* 18.73? Was he overconfident in his renewed state in *Bg* 11.1? Or was he genuinely restored but traumatized to the point that he continued to regress repeatedly? The latter option seems to fit the combat context best, make sense of explicit declarations, honor Kṛṣṇa's ability, and explain why he, again and again, repeated the pattern.

### **8.2.7 Bhīṣma Parvan, CVII: Same Scene, Different Sadhī**

Arjuna suggested two alternatives: to fulfill his commitment by fighting, killing his kin, going to hell, or shirking his *dharma* and spending his life in exile. Neither option is his *dharma*. His *dharma*, in this instance, was to fight and kill Bhīṣma. Arjuna's response, "I will do thy bidding, " may be a hint of reluctance."<sup>1187</sup> In contrast to the glorious conclusion of the *Bg*, the account in *Bhīṣma Parvan* CVII presents Arjuna begrudgingly fulfilling his oath. Though he was making a half-hearted attempt to restrain his prowess against Bhīṣma, he is not confused to the degree that his faculties of perception and reason are entirely ineffective. In sporting parlance, he is playing the game, but he is not playing *to win*.

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<sup>1186</sup> See *Bg* 1.35, *etān na hantum icchhāmi ghnatopi*, "I have no desire to kill them who are committed to killing [us]." Arjuna is speaking frankly, thus, the pr. indic. act. of *√iṣ*. I infer the sense of "committed" for *ghnatopi* from context. The *Bg* is making a stark contrast. An army entered the field with the primary objective of killing Arjuna because they know they cannot win apart from his death. Arjuna's response, however, gives them a second option of winning because he has lost the desire to fight and kill which he robustly promised the day prior. See the n. gen. sg. *rājyasya* ("for the sovereignty") as a connection. He desires no kingdom by the means of killing his kin, here, or anywhere.

<sup>1187</sup> See *Bg* 18.73. It is the same response.



In the following scene, his reluctance and restraint again infuriated Kṛṣṇa to the extreme. Kṛṣṇa perceived his struggle to view his kin as indifferent. Therefore, his *sadhī* at *that* moment for Arjuna was for him not to delay engaging his foe, lest he quickly lose control of his faculties. In other words, committing *karmanighora* was his means of not succumbing to the same fate of his allies who scattered in all directions committing *a-dharma* acts. On the other hand, if he continued to fight half-heartedly, he would surrender and be led astray by the same *guṇas* that are causing reluctance and confusion. As the scene closed, Kṛṣṇa once again reordered Arjuna to combat-readiness, resulting in an effective re-engagement of the Kurus. Or, at the least, Arjuna was restored to the point that he could reenter the fight, but this particular scene becomes more complicated when Kṛṣṇa *continues* to observe Arjuna’s half-hearted assault upon Bhīṣma.

Having once again witnessed Arjuna’s resistance to fulfill his commitment (his *svadharmā*), Kṛṣṇa once again became enraged to the point that he dismounted Arjuna’s chariot to kill Bhīṣma. The *Mhba* describes Kṛṣṇa’s eyes as “red as copper,” noting that he approached Bhīṣma with nothing other than his arms and hands as weapons (and a whip). Both armies were stupefied and sure they were viewing Bhīṣma’s death. Contrary to Arjuna’s reluctance, Bhīṣma enthusiastically welcomed the duel “with a fearless heart,” which he knew would result in his death.<sup>1188</sup> The perception and actions of Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma vividly contrasted Arjuna’s “mildness,” for what could be better than fighting and dying in a “*dharma* approved” (*dhārmyaṃ saṅgrāmaṃ*) duel at the hands of Kṛṣṇa (*cf. Bg 2.31-32, 37-38*)? Bhīṣma’s perception led him to rightly reason the “good fortune” of being slain by Kṛṣṇa (*yadṛcchayā, Bg 2.32*). Whereas Arjuna struggled to remain committed, Bhīṣma expressed the joy of battle and indifference to life or death. Bhīṣma

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<sup>1188</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVII.

became the model *kṣatriya* of Kṛṣṇa’s theologically grounded, epistemological preparation for combat. Bhīṣma rejoices,

“ ... throw me down today in this great battle. O god, slain by you in battle, O sinless one, great will be the good done to me, O Krishna, in every respect in the world. Amongst all, in the three worlds, great is the honor done to me today in battle, O Govinda. Strike me as you please, for I am thy slave ...”

The end appears inevitable until Arjuna intervenes *again* on behalf of Kṛṣṇa. In this turn of events, Arjuna takes hold of Kṛṣṇa’s legs, but Kṛṣṇa drags him for several meters. Finally, Kṛṣṇa relented and returned to his station, yet still angered with Arjuna and the events unfolding. Now taking the role of a counselor (Kṛṣṇa’s role), Arjuna provides *sadhī* to Kṛṣṇa by reminding him of *his* pre-war commitment, saying, “O you of mighty arms, stop, O Kesava, it behooves you not to make those words false which you had spoken before, *viz.*, I will not fight. O Madhava, people will say that you are a liar. All this burden rests upon me.”<sup>1189</sup> The guṇic tides of *karmaṇighora* have ebbed and flowed, but this time it was Arjuna who reminded Kṛṣṇa of his specific commitment. Kṛṣṇa took the reigns, still very much angered. Arjuna reassured his lord of his desire to fulfill his commission, stating, “I swear, O Kesava, by my weapons, by truth, and my good deeds.”<sup>1190</sup>

### 8.2.8 *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVIII: *Karmaṇighora* Caused Arjuna to Defer his Commitment

In the following scene, we find another example of Arjuna’s indecision. As the night fell, Yudhiṣṭhira withdrew his army in defeat. Though overcome with sorrow, he convened his war council. Following deliberations, the king turned to Kṛṣṇa, who then declared that he would kill Bhīṣma if Arjuna were unwilling. Kṛṣṇa reiterated the necessity of Arjuna fulfilling his promise. Hearing this, Yudhiṣṭhira brightened, but the council decided to seek Bhīṣma to ask how he may

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<sup>1189</sup> Gagnuli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVII, 266-267.

<sup>1190</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVII, 267.

be killed. Having done so, the Parthas returned to their camp with a strategy from the mouth of their greatest adversary—their grandfather—whom they cherished above all others. At a later moment, the *Mhba* provides the conversation between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna was present in all of these scenes. Though Kṛṣṇa informed the king that he would fulfill Arjuna’s task, Arjuna is the one that *should* kill Bhīṣma, for he is abundantly skilled to do so. Having listened, Arjuna again allowed the *guṇas* to overtake his reasoning, for he reverted to his objection of killing his kin from the *Bg*. He then cried out to Kṛṣṇa regarding how he could not possibly kill his grandfather, citing many childhood memories. Kṛṣṇa answered as he had on many other occasions, “Having vowed the slaughter of Bhīṣma before, O Jishnu, how can you abstain from slaying him, agreeably to the duties of a kshatriya?”<sup>1191</sup> In the end, Arjuna found a compromise. Bhīma suggested putting Sikhandin before them, for Bhīṣma had vowed he would not fight Sikhandin, who had been born a woman in a previous life. As the story unfolded, Arjuna encouraged Sikhandin to accept the plan and even placed victory’s burden and their reputations upon his shoulders.<sup>1192</sup> Though it was a well-calculated plan, the elephant in the room was Arjuna, who should have led the attack. Embarrassingly, he welcomed an opportunity to defer to a lesser *kṣatriya*.

### **8.2.9 *Karna Parvan*, LXVIII-LXXI: Yudhiṣṭhira’s Rash Comment**

In a final example, I offer a scene from the *Karna Parvan*, Yudhiṣṭhira chastised Arjuna for his inability to kill Karna, insulting him to the point that Arjuna vowed to kill his brother. As in other instances, Arjuna’s combat ineffectiveness led to lopsided losses from the hand of Bhīṣma. The confrontation begins with a misunderstanding. Yudhiṣṭhira, far from danger, sees Arjuna and

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<sup>1191</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVII. Kṛṣṇa reinforces his statements by reminding Arjuna that this is an “eternal duty sanctioned for the kshatriyas.”

<sup>1192</sup> See Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CIX-CXI; CXVIII.

Kṛṣṇa approaching. He assumes they have slain Karna, but they are returning from the slaying of Droṇa's son, Aśvatthāmā.<sup>1193</sup> Overjoyed, he enthusiastically requested the details of the downfall of his long-time nemesis.<sup>1194</sup> However, the king's mood changed. Rather than leaving victoriously over Karna, Arjuna left under duress, stating that his reason was for his brother's safety (Karna spotted Yudhiṣṭhira).<sup>1195</sup>

Upon hearing why Arjuna left the heat of the battle, Yudhiṣṭhira condemned Arjuna for leaving Bhīma still engaged and outnumbered and assuming out of fear of Karna.<sup>1196</sup> A litany of insults followed: Arjuna's leadership is inept; fear is the source of his withdrawal; abandoning Bhīma is a violation of his duties and a sign of his inability to perform effectively. Once again, Arjuna's integrity, reliability, and commitment to his pre-war promise was questioned.

You had, O Partha, said unto me in the Dwaita woods that you would, on a single car, slay Karna. Why, then, through fear of Karna have you come here, avoiding Karna and deserting Bhima? If in the Dwaita woods you had said unto me, 'O king, I shall not be able to fight with Karna,' we would then, O Partha, have made other arrangements suitable to the circumstances. Having promised me the slaughter of Karna, you have not, O hero, kept that promise.<sup>1197</sup>

Furthermore, Yudhiṣṭhira's directed his insult to Arjuna's commitment to his word. Yudhiṣṭhira questions his effectiveness and the reliability of his promise but then goes to the very heart of the embattled *kṣatriya*. The king questions his motive, integrity, and whether Arjuna intended to fulfill his pre-war promise. Challenging Arjuna in such a way contradicts how the epic portrays Arjuna before the war. Arjuna is *the* dharma *kṣatriya* of the *Kali Yuga*. Heavenly witnesses and a prophetic

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<sup>1193</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXV. Ganguli translates that his joy causing him to choke on his words.

<sup>1194</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVI.

<sup>1195</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVII. He was indeed effective, but later notes how Karna overwhelmed the army.

<sup>1196</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIII.

<sup>1197</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIII.

voice from heaven confirmed his destiny at his birth from Kunti.<sup>1198</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira affirmed at his birth that he would be equal to Viṣṇu.<sup>1199</sup> Arjuna has not suddenly forgotten his sense of unique identity. Instead, combat and the subsequent ebb and flow of the *guṇas* pulled him like a ship adrift in a storm.<sup>1200</sup>

The following scene supports my conclusion. Impassioned by anger and disappointment, Yudhiṣṭhira crossed a line that Arjuna had sworn would not go unpunished. Ganguli translates the offense.

If you art unable to resist the fierce son of Radha today, as he is careering in battle, give this your Gandiva today to some other king, that may be your superior in (the use and knowledge of) weapons. If that be done, the world will not then behold us bereft of sons and wives, deprived of happiness in consequence of the loss of kingdom, and sunk, O son of Pāṇḍu, in an unfathomable hell of great misery. It would have been better for you if thou had never been born in the womb of Kunti, or having taken your birth there, if you had come out on the fifth month an abortion, than to have, O prince, thus come away from battle, O you of wicked soul!<sup>1201</sup>

Arjuna’s unwillingness to ‘fight to win’ is costing lives. Yudhiṣṭhira strikes at the heart of his brother. After days of savage conflict, Arjuna’s closest relationship (outside Kṛṣṇa) deteriorated to the point that the elder brother declared it would have been better (for all of us who are fighting to win) if his beloved younger brother had been aborted in the second trimester.<sup>1202</sup>

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<sup>1198</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira references how even the voice of Arjuna’s divine progenitor promised that he would be as mighty as How he would have victory at Khāṇḍava Vana (forest) over gods and men, and specifically mentions victory over the Kurus. He references that he will be as mighty as Keśava (Viṣṇu). His expectations are dashed bringing him to yet another lowpoint in the war, lamenting, “All that, however, hath not come to pass. Alas, it shows that the gods even may speak untruths!”

<sup>1199</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIII.

<sup>1200</sup> As previously noted, the *Mhba* employs the metaphor of a ship caught in a tempest or person sinking to the depths of the ocean.

<sup>1201</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIII.

<sup>1202</sup> This “wordy dart” may have caused Arjuna to recall looking across Kurukṣetra and seeing his enemies in their familial relationship (*Bg* 1.26-27, 34). The phrase “wordy dart” is a common term in Ganguli’s translation. This particular insult would have been one of many by Yudhiṣṭhira for which Arjuna rebukes in *Karna Parvan* LXX. Soon after, he condemned the “family destroyers” (*Bg* 1.42). See also *Bg* 1.39, 40. The term *kulaghnānām kulasya* is the

This is a grave statement to any person, but the insult that Arjuna will not abide implies that Gandīva should pass to a different *kṣatriya*. Gandīva was divinely gifted to him alone. Upon hearing those words, Arjuna unsheathed his sword and advanced toward his brother with the intent of killing him. It is not because his older brother had questioned his morality or lack of prowess; it is because of his insult regarding Gandīva. Fortunate for the Pāṇḍavā cause, Kṛṣṇa prevented a potentially devastating turn of events. The scene continues, and Kṛṣṇa questioned why Arjuna had grasped his sword, intent on striking down his brother and king. He reminded him of proper combat etiquette and how he was moving toward an unsanctioned engagement.<sup>1203</sup> However, Arjuna saw no alternative means to “keep his vow,” “end his mourning and fever,” and “fulfill his debt to truth.”<sup>1204</sup> I take the mentioning of fever as a manifestation of his anger toward Yudhiṣṭhira. In other words, Arjuna is ‘red hot.’ I infer this is not the type of fever that describes his original crisis. This phenomenon results from a long line of barbs forcefully disclosed in *Karna Parvan*, LXX.<sup>1205</sup> Kṛṣṇa rightly assessed Yudhiṣṭhira’s cause of the angered insults/questioning.<sup>1206</sup>

In seeking Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna realized the cause of his foolish remarks and vows.”<sup>1207</sup> There is a dilemma. Arjuna cannot allow Yudhiṣṭhira’s specific insult to go unchecked, for it is shameful for a *kṣatriya* not to keep a vow. Yet, he *now* knows how deeply wrong it would be to kill his brother and king. Therefore, he requests wisdom from Kṛṣṇa to find a third option that provides him the ability to save face and his brother’s life. Arjuna’s attachment to his rage and sense of justice nearly caused him to commit fratricide.

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combination of the m. g. pl. TP cpd *kulaghnānām* and the n. gen. sg. *kulasya*. Arjuna is not speaking of a “family killer.” He is suggesting they are *all* family killers.

<sup>1203</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXIX. Kṛṣṇa explains that there is no one in his vicinity to fight.

<sup>1204</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXIX.

<sup>1205</sup> His rant was by the direction of Kṛṣṇa in his strategy to reconcile the brothers. However, this comment was one of the reasons for the rant.

<sup>1206</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXIX

<sup>1207</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXIX

Moreover, Yudhiṣṭhira's insults came in the heat of battle when their army suffered significant losses. Kṛṣṇa must intervene, or the war would have likely been lost. He explained that the physical and non-physical trauma took its toll upon Yudhiṣṭhira, who was at the time "under the influence of grief."<sup>1208</sup> Kṛṣṇa provided a solution to preserve his honor and his king's life, bring reconciliation and invigorate Arjuna's recommitment to slaying Karna.

Arjuna was filled with a level of anger that caused a temporary transgression of the *kṣatriya* code. However, he can still allow Kṛṣṇa to correct (re-order) him.<sup>1209</sup> His intention to kill his brother was strongly influenced by the many traumatic experiences of *karmanighora* temporarily returning him to a state similar to his crisis, for Kṛṣṇa questions, "What is this delusion of your mind?"<sup>1210</sup> In this case, it is not a crisis of his determination to not kill when he should kill; it is a delusion of his mind causing his decision to kill when he should not kill.

Arjuna continues to struggle. Even as part of the reconciliation with his brother, he cannot bear the words that Kṛṣṇa instructed him to say. It was nothing more than a public exchange to satisfy Arjuna's vow symbolically. But the words that were meant to bring reconciliation caused Arjuna to sink to a new low, now considering suicide as the only just punishment for his wickedness.<sup>1211</sup> Kṛṣṇa intervenes again, arguing what would be the good of that? Reconciliation quickly follows once Kṛṣṇa explains that Arjuna's actions were under his orders. Arjuna appears to be again combat ready, swearing on several occasions that he and Kṛṣṇa will slay Karna and save Bhīma.

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<sup>1208</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXIX

<sup>1209</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIV.

<sup>1210</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan*, LXVIV.

<sup>1211</sup> His insults to his brother are causing him to now contemplate suicide.

## Summary

In this chapter, I provided accounts from the war illustrating how the traumatic experience of *karmanighora* was so powerful that Arjuna could not maintain a state of combat-readiness because he could not remain indifferent to the *guṇas*. Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi* in combat was more than adequate, but it could not wholly insulate him (and other great heroes like Yudhiṣṭhira) from common postcombat nonphysical traumas. Consequently, Arjuna wavered from *dharma* to *a-dharma*, from order to disorder, from combat effectiveness to ineffectiveness, from commitment to fulfill his pre-war promise to indecisiveness and resistance, and from ideation of suicide to reconciliation with his brother. The *Mhba* does not record Arjuna regressing to the state one finds in *Bg* 1.20-2.9. On the contrary, he struggled, regretted, was chastised, made rash oaths, enraged Kṛṣṇa through his unwillingness to commit to killing Bhiṣma and Droṇa, nearly killed his brother, and he nearly killed himself. Still, he did not sit on the seat of his chariot, having cast Gāṇḍīva down to the ground. At times, he appeared resistant and reluctant, yet we do not find a repeated scene resembling his prior, total psycho-physio-emotional breakdown. Quite the contrast, he often is the one who provided *śādhi* to Yudhiṣṭhira and even to his friend and lord, Kṛṣṇa.

There appears to be no *kṣatriya* entirely indifferent to the nonphysical traumas of “violent, gory combat.”<sup>1212</sup> Nonphysical trauma is so disruptive to Arjuna's *guṇa-karma* epistemological faculties that he must hear *again and again* a form of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi*. The agent of *śādhi* may be his brother(s), himself, Kṛṣṇa, or the short narrative exploits of an ancient god.<sup>1213</sup> It is not Kṛṣṇa's oral teaching/re-teaching of *śādhi* alone that is at the heart of his restoration. It is the *presence* of Kṛṣṇa that reassures Arjuna to engage in and adequately respond to *karmanighora*. In the war,

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<sup>1212</sup> Bhiṣma, Droṇa, and Karna are not impeccable, for their decisions to fight for Dhṛtarāṣṭra are founded in error.

<sup>1213</sup> The instances of his vacillation and restoration become the applied examples of Sañjaya's intent in the epilogue.



Kṛṣṇa’s presence was synonymous with what we learned about the positioning of Sthānu before him (them). Arjuna is not a perfect example; he is not ideal. Instead, Arjuna is the imperfect model of a struggling *kṣatriya* who later *kṣatriyas* may hear and visualize their struggles with postcombat, nonphysical traumas. Perhaps, in small groups where men and women gather, they may listen and imagine what it means to say, whenever Kṛṣṇa leads and wherever Kṛṣṇa is, there is victory. After all, *guṇabhūto jayah kṛṣṇe*, “victory is Kṛṣṇa’s *guṇa*-nature.<sup>1214</sup>

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<sup>1214</sup> *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 21.

## **Part 3**

### **Conclusion**

## Chapter 9

### *Śādhi*: Kṛṣṇa’s Loving ‘preparation’ and the Soul Challenge of Emerging Combat Trauma Literature

#### Introduction

The aim of this thesis focused on how Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* (*guṇa-karma* epistemology) re-ordered Arjuna for war and prepared him for the experiences of *karmanighora*. In addition, I provided accounts from the *Mhba* illustrating how nonphysical trauma continued to disorder Arjuna (others) throughout the war. In several instances, Arjuna took the reversed role of restoring Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa. Yet, often, Arjuna displayed a stark change from his pre-war commitment to punish the Kurus, becoming an example of an *a-dharma*, disordered and confused *kṣatriya*. Of course, he was not ideal, for Kṛṣṇa alone is the ideal *kṣatriya*, the “eternal non-doer” (*akartāram avyayam*, *Bg* 4.13, 13-14).<sup>1215</sup> I suggested Arjuna is the *model* who strove while struggling to fulfill the command to be like the “ancient ones of old” (*pūrvaiḥ pūrvataram*), those who rightly perceived Kṛṣṇa’s ontology and allowed it to infuse their “work” (*kṛtam*, see *Bg* 4.15).<sup>1216</sup>

I described the confused state as a shift from order to disorder, from combat readiness to combat ineffectiveness. The primary cause of Arjuna’s crisis was the domination of his epistemological faculties by the *guṇas* of his material nature (*indriya*, *Bg* 2.8). His submission to their traumatizing impact upon his “inner world of experience” broke down his will to resist their presence.<sup>1217</sup> Thus, despite declarations like *Bg* 18.73, Arjuna struggled to endure combat trauma’s ongoing, temporal impact.

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<sup>1215</sup> *akartāram* (m. acc. sg.) *avyayam* (m. acc. sg.).

<sup>1216</sup> *pūrvaiḥ* (m. inst. pl.), *pūrvataram* (comparative adv.) *kṛtam* (n. acc.sg. p. pass. partcpl. of √kr). The p. pass. partcpl. means the body of work the ancients accomplished in their cycle of birth/rebirth.

<sup>1217</sup> Wilson, *The Posttraumatic Self*, 9.

I cite the following examples of Arjuna’s back-and-forth combat state of mind and Kṛṣṇa’s post-*Bg śādhi*. For example, following the death of his son, Arjuna makes a passion-driven, rash oath to kill Jayadratha by the end of the next day. Having calmed his senses through counsel, Kṛṣṇa leaves his dear friend to sleep in his chamber under guard. Having retired to his tent, Kṛṣṇa reclined and pondered strategies for Arjuna’s victory and recovery. Sañjaya retells that Kṛṣṇa “began for Partha's sake, to think of various means that would dispel (Partha's) grief and anxiety and enhance his prowess and splendour.”<sup>1218</sup> Mourning and mental stress were at the heart of Arjuna’s impending doom, for the foes themselves awaiting him were more than formidable. In this instance, grief’s postcombat trauma directly impacts combat readiness and effectiveness. Similar to Brian S. Powers’ findings in *Full Darkness*, the *guṇas* function like original sin and the negative power of violence to impede basic and advanced military conditioning. Powers writes of the “distortion and misapprehension of what we *should* desire, to deform and bind the way we make the most basic decisions.”<sup>1219</sup> However, in the combat context of the *Bg*, Arjuna should desire *to* kill, even kill the resistance to not killing. Thus, his saga profoundly challenges the Judeo-Christian concept of sin and morality.

On reflection, Kṛṣṇa realized the improbability of fulfilling that ill-advised oath. Out of his love for Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa intervened, promising “... wrath for the sake of the son of Pandu” and divine destruction of his foes.<sup>1220</sup> That night, Kṛṣṇa prepares for battle commanding his chariot driver, Karuka, to arm his chariot. While others spent a sleepless night in anguish, Kṛṣṇa caused Arjuna to fall into a deep sleep where he transported him in a dream to the presence of the “Great God,” Mahadeva. While there, Kṛṣṇa counseled Arjuna not to grieve, not allow grief to fill his

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<sup>1218</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXIX, 153.

<sup>1219</sup> Powers, *Full Darkness*, 40. Emphasis his.

<sup>1220</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXIX, 154.

heart, and not let distress negatively impact his leadership, for it also negatively impacts the entire army. Kṛṣṇa directly addressed the impact of Arjuna’s nonphysical combat wound (grief). Ganguli translates, “The grief that makes a person forgo all efforts is, indeed, O Dhananjaya, an enemy of that person.”<sup>1221</sup> After more counsel (*śādhī*), Arjuna requests that Mahadeva grant him his wish (a “boon”) to defeat Jayadratha. Mahadeva granted his wish and directed him to the location of the celestial bow, *Brahmacharin*. Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa then left Mahadeva’s presence, restored, and recommitted.

Not much further in the battle, Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to show indifference to a prior relationship. We then find Arjuna fighting with all of his might after Kṛṣṇa seized the moment. Ganguli translates, “Do not show any mercy to Kritavarman! Disregarding thy relationship (with him), crush and slay him!”<sup>1222</sup> The traumatic experience of loss and grief overcame his preparation in the *Bg*. Yet, Kṛṣṇa’s response sufficiently restores Arjuna to a state of mind (combat readiness) whereby he may rise in the morning and complete his promise. Like Fred Turner writes in *Echoes of Combat*, Kṛṣṇa restores Arjuna’s ability to see his mission as a “rescue” of the army in the face of destruction. The concept of a rescue mission reinvigorates Arjuna, especially after he is re-equipped with the necessary weapons to complete his objective.<sup>1223</sup> Unlike Powers assumption, where the rescue mission mentality always temporarily establishes emotional stability, Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* assumes that it will work as long as Arjuna wills himself to remain indifferent. However, in the end, Arjuna keeps returning to the same position as Turner recalls a soldier once saying, “But

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<sup>1221</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXX, 155.

<sup>1222</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XCI, 178.

<sup>1223</sup> Turner, *Echoes of Combat*, 97-122.

when the mission ends ... the let down is the killer. The adrenaline wears off and then you start to hurt.”<sup>1224</sup>

I will now draw two conclusions. The first conclusion responds to the research question: *Is there adequate spiritual and psychological preparation for killing in war?* The second is related. From the broader combat context of the *Mhba*, do ‘soul wounds’ exist as described *ECTL*? I will then examine the further impact of my conclusions on two other vital areas of *ECTL*: making sense of war and veteran suicide.

### **9.1 Does Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* adequately prepare Arjuna for the consequences of killing at Kurukṣetra?**

Brock and Lettini ask if there is an “adequate preparation for the psychological and spiritual consequences of killing.” From the perspective of the *Bg*, as it prepares the reader for the *Mhbn* war, the answer is ‘yes,’ *if the kṣatriya can perpetually* fight with indifference and single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa (*Bg* 11.54). There indeed were *kṣatriyas* who displayed over and above what was required to execute Kṛṣṇa’s “work” (*Bg* 3.8; *Bg* 11.54-55). For example, Radheya spoke of training his mind not to see or think of the Pāṇḍavās as his brothers, for he loved them, and fought only for the Kauravas out of loyalty and friendship. He embraced the *kṣatriya* way of combat by focusing on his *dharma* responsibility. Another example is Droṇa, who contrasted *Bg* 2.31-32, 37 following the slaying of Bhīṣma. He will either defeat his enemies or be vanquished, reasoning,

*kathaṃ nu kuryām aham āhave bhayam? ... raṇe caran yaśaḥ paraṃ jagati vibhāvya vartitā; parair hato yudhi śayitātha vā punas.*<sup>1225</sup>

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<sup>1224</sup> Turner, *Echoes of Combat*, 122.

<sup>1225</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, 1.15. I take *yaśas* to be an instrumental of accompaniment, hence, “with world fame.” Ganguli opts for a causative sense, “Because of world fame,” Whitney, 92.

Indeed, in what manner should I fear [for my life] in battle,  
Engaging in battle, with greatest of world-fame, having been slain in battle or  
else asleep.

Droṇa’s cavalier response contrasts Arjuna’s doom and gloom forecast in *Bg* 1.31, “seeing misfortune after killing my people in war” (see also *Bg* 1.37).<sup>1226</sup> Droṇa is indifferent to death or a night of sleep. In another example of Droṇa from the *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 98.1-5, Arjuna is mentioned beside him as equally disciplined in warcraft. In one instance, Dhṛtarāṣṭra requested to know of the duel between Droṇa (referenced as the son of Bhāradvāja) and Arjuna (Dhananjaya). He emphasized their strong mutual love (*priyas*, v2), explicitly requesting to know the nature of how they “equally engaged [each other] in battle” (*samīyatur yuddhe*, v3). This question is significant because a critical component in Arjuna’s crisis was seeing and knowing he would have to fight and kill his preceptor, Droṇa.<sup>1227</sup> Sañjaya remarks,

*na droṇaḥ samare pārthaṃ jānīte priyam ātmanaḥ  
kṣatradharmaṃ puraskṛtya pārtho vā gurum āhave  
na kṣatriyā raṇe rājan varjayanti parasparam  
nirmaryādam hi yudhyante pitṛbhir bhrātr̥bhiḥ saha*<sup>1228</sup>

Droṇa does not perceive Partha (Arjuna) on the battlefield as dear to himself.  
Concerning a *kṣatriya*’s *dharma* (duty), neither Partha his guru in battle.  
King, no *kṣatriya* turns away from one another in battle.  
Indeed, unrestrained, they fight fathers and brothers at the same time.

There are moments of great courage and selfless action in this prolonged battle. As the narrator describes the battlefield as an “ocean of blood,”

“... And the wonderful sight we saw there, O Bharata, was that neither in their army nor in thine was a single person that was unwilling to fight. And thus, O monarch,

<sup>1226</sup> See *na ca śreyonupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave. Droṇa Parvan*, 1.15 shares *āhave*.

<sup>1227</sup> See the accusative plural *ācāryān* in *Bg* 1.26. Many of the *kṣatriyas* were seeing their teachers lined against them.

<sup>1228</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, 103.4-5. For *varjayanti*, see Williams, Monier-Monier, 1009.

did those brave warriors, of both thy army and the Pāṇḍavā, fight, seeking glory and desirous of victory.”<sup>1229</sup>

However, the accounts of the war tell stories of *kṣatriyas* who could not remain in a state of single-minded devotion *as* they executed the war. Most of the combatants could not remain indifferent to their experiences and actions. Heroic *kṣatriyas* were highly trained, well experienced, accomplished in arms, and exceeding others in their might. Yet, training and conditioning eventually succumb to war's emotions, sounds, sights, and brutal acts. For example, at one point in the second day, combatants became indistinguishable, “... impelled by the desire of slaughter [they] could not distinguish friend from foe. And those brave warriors, incapable of being easily defeated in battle, even began to strike down their own friend.”<sup>1230</sup> On the tenth day, the chivalric code of the *kṣatriyas* continued to crumble. There is little order or reason for their confrontations. It is an account of debased, savage anarchy.

In course of the general engagement that followed, the same class of combatants did not fight with the same class of combatants. Car-warriors fought not with car-warriors, or foot-soldiers with foot-soldiers, or horsemen with horsemen, or elephant-warriors with elephant-warriors. ... In that fierce slaughter when elephants and men spread themselves on the field, all distinctions between them ceased, for they fought indiscriminately.<sup>1231</sup>

In another scene, upon hearing that Droṇa promised [to the Kauravas] to capture Yudhiṣṭhira (when Arjuna was otherwise engaged), Arjuna calmed the anxiety of his older brother, assured victory even if Vṣṇu led the assault. However, he still confessed he would rather die than fight his teacher.<sup>1232</sup> Reluctance to fight and kill was not the way of the *kṣatriya* caste, yet in the war, it appeared to be the way of many *kṣatriyas*. In an earlier scene, shortly before Bhīṣma's defeat,

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<sup>1229</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, Section LXXIX.

<sup>1230</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LIV.

<sup>1231</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CXIX, 298.

<sup>1232</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, XIII, 27.



Kṛṣṇa reminded Arjuna that fate had determined his death, and the *kṣatriya* must fulfill his part. Kṛṣṇa shared the following by tying Arjuna's pre-war commitment with basic knowledge of their caste role.

Vasudeva said, 'Having vowed the slaughter of Bhishma before, O Jishnu, how canst thou abstain from slaying him, agreeably to the duties of a Kshatriya? ... This hath been settled before by the gods. That which hath been destined before, O Partha, must happen. It cannot be otherwise.... Slay Bhishma, without any anxiety. ... One should slay even an aged person endued with every merit and worthy of reverence if he cometh as a foe, or indeed any other who approaches for destroying one's self--O Dhananjaya, this is the eternal duty sanctioned for the Kshatriya, viz., that they should fight, protect subjects, and perform sacrifices, all without malice.'<sup>1233</sup>

Arjuna's purpose from birth was to slay Bhīṣma. Moreover, Arjuna swore an oath and could not break his word without serious negative *karma* repercussions. As we refocus on Arjuna's commitment to his pre-war promise by looking at his entire body of bloody work, the conclusion is that Kṛṣṇa indeed re-ordered him to combat readiness. He left Kṛṣṇa's counsel positive, confident, and determined. Still, the ability to remain singularly focused upon Kṛṣṇa did not outlast the day's end. Given the context, he began to regress toward disorder. He could not maintain the discipline to fight as one who is not concerned about the consequences of his actions (*Bg* 2.47). As a result, his record is wavering back and forth between what he knows he must do and his moment-by-moment struggle to perceive the traumas and treat them with indifference.

His vacillation came quickly and randomly. In *Karna Parvan* 16, he is a stone-cold killing machine. When motivated to get revenge for the illicit death of his son by killing Jayadratha, he had no hesitations, vowing, "Blood shall flow (in torrents) from the breasts of fallen men and

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<sup>1233</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVIII, 271-272.

elephants and steeds, split open by whetted shafts falling fast upon them!”<sup>1234</sup> This is the pre-war Arjuna. Yet, the *Droṇa Parvan* records that he doubted his ability to fulfill his promise to kill Jayadratha.<sup>1235</sup> Yet, a few moments later, he turns again, and his vengeful fury associates him with Kṛṣṇa-Visnu, the “all-consuming death.” Then, Arjuna furiously attacked *while* “burning of grief” over the death of his son.<sup>1236</sup> A common battlefield emotion consumed him even when he fulfilled his destiny (*Bhīṣma Parvan*, CVIII). This is the post-*Gītā* Arjuna, only days after his conversation with Kṛṣṇa.

Arjuna continued to struggle with the destiny of his birth. In another instance in the *Droṇa Parvan*, having presented a half-hearted defense against Kripa, he worried that he would go to hell for breaking the code prohibiting a pupil from striking his preceptor.<sup>1237</sup> Later on in the *Droṇa Parvan*, Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma must strongly urge him to live up to his birth.<sup>1238</sup> Yet, in *Karna* 16, having heard Droṇa’s son roar for joy, Arjuna tells Kṛṣṇa, “Behold, O Madhava, this wickedness towards me of the preceptor's son. He regards us to be slain, having shrouded us with his dense arrowy shower. I will presently, however, *by my training* and might, baffle his purpose.”<sup>1239</sup>

I conclude the following. Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* prepared Arjuna for war, which was his specific work, yet *śādhi* did *not* insulate him from nonphysical combat trauma, which was the impact of *karmanīghora*. While the *Mhba* depicts Arjuna vacillating in his commitment, he does not experience a completely debilitating state like in *Bg* 1.20-2.8. He waivers, but he does not continue to sit out the war. His experience was a pattern of struggling with the burden of his pre-war commitment and all that promise required. More importantly, only because of his preparation

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<sup>1234</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXVI, 147.

<sup>1235</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXX, 155.

<sup>1236</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, LXXXV, 165; XC, 177.

<sup>1237</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXLVI, 326. See also, CLXXVII, 411.

<sup>1238</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXXXVI, 433.

<sup>1239</sup> Ganguli, *Karna Parvan* 16. Emphasis mine.

through Kṛṣṇa's *śādhi* can he return again and again to combat-readiness. Was he adequately prepared? The answer is 'yes.' Was Arjuna fully protected from combat? The answer is a resounding 'no.' Could he or any other *kṣatriya* maintain a state of readiness in prolonged exposure to combat? The witness from the combat context of the *Mhba* strongly argues, 'no.' One can be corrected, restored, or reordered, but one cannot be insulated. Because this is the reality of war, combat in the *Kali Yuga* demands a genuine desire to endure the long-lasting nonphysical postcombat traumas.<sup>1240</sup> The ultimate assurance is knowing that the one who was before you in battle (Sthānu) is the one that has been with you every day in the chariot (Kṛṣṇa), and that is real loving *śādhi*.

## **9.2 Is there even such a thing as a 'soul wound' from the perspective of the *Bg* in its *Mhbn* combat context?**

Combat veterans describe their long-term trauma in spiritual and theological terms, but is ECTL correctly articulating their experiences?<sup>1241</sup> The recent emergence of combat trauma literature brings the growing pains of finding a broad consensus regarding definitions and concepts for terms like soul wound, invisible wound, combat stress injury, and moral injury. In this thesis, I have argued that the more recent work of Brad Kelle and Joseph McDonald are precedents for moving toward reading sacred texts for insight, much like Jonathon Shay pioneered with *Achilles in Vietnam* in the early 1990s. I further argued the *Bg* provides a unique perspective among all sacred texts.

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<sup>1240</sup> *titikṣasva*.

<sup>1241</sup> For example, see Peter A. French's *War and Moral Dissonance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 53. Although French grounds his understanding of humanity and evil in the biblical narrative of Adam and his fall, French lacks an understanding of ancient near east culture—or biblical nuance, i.e., his discussion on the "image of God" and the Nephilim.

Kevin McSorley writes that the academy has approached the relationship between war and the body with “limited and sporadic attention,” lacking “clear disciplinary patterns.”<sup>1242</sup> My observation is that there is a current trend within ECTL to generalize and merge ontological concepts, e.g., moral injury and soul wound. The primary reason for the lack of nuance is that no single theological tradition has dominated the literature and challenged the psychology-based paradigm.

Brad Kelle addresses this challenge when he substantiates his hermeneutic of “creative readings” of biblical narratives because of a “commonly expressed need” for “broader methodological input and greater methodological precision.”<sup>1243</sup> In other words, he sees examples of what could be understood as moral injuries, though Kelle writes, “Moral injury doesn’t have a single, agreed-upon definition.”<sup>1244</sup> Others have recently challenged the common parlance. For example, in a study led by Kent Drescher, they determined that the term “moral injury” is beneficial (“needed”) because it captures what many have long observed in combat veterans beyond the “construct” of PTSD. Though they agreed that a type of wound exists presently not adequately defined under the PTSD model, they found the “present definitional statement” of moral injury to be “inadequate.”<sup>1245</sup> Frankfurt and Frazier concluded that “further theorizing and research” are needed to “clarify the definition” of actions like killing an enemy in battle.<sup>1246</sup>

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<sup>1242</sup> McSorley, Kevin, *War and the body*, 12.

<sup>1243</sup> Kelle, Brad, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture alongside War’s Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 11, 41.

<sup>1244</sup> Kelle, Brad, *The Bible and Moral Injury*, 22.

<sup>1245</sup> Dreschler, *et al.*, “An Exploration of the Viability and Usefulness of the Construct of Moral Injury in Combat Veterans,” *Traumatology* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 8. DOI: 10.1177/15347656103395615. (Accessed 8-28-2021)

<sup>1246</sup> Frankfurt, Sheila, Patricia Frazier, “A Review of Research on Moral Injury in Combat Veterans” *Military Psychology* 28, no. 5 (September 2016): 318. DOI: 10.1037/MIL0000132. (Accessed 8-28-2021)

Tick wrote, “war’s invisible wound is not comprehensible from the standpoint of normative psychology.”<sup>1247</sup> Tick’s statement and those from above illustrate how ECTL has moved from its mother discipline to benefit from a sacred source’s *soul clarity*. We come now to the question at hand. From the perspective of the *Bg*, is there such a thing as a soul wound?

For example, what are the commonly thrown “wordy darts” that metaphorically pierce *kṣatriyas* in their ‘heart?’ What is damaged? It cannot be the ontological nature of the *ātman*. References to “wordy darts” pertain to harsh, condemnatory, often unjustified comments thrown by all ranks of men. In their context, a “wordy dart” refers to a verbal attack received and recognized for its traumatic impact, and it is always a cruel act of great seriousness. For example, the ingrateful Duryodhana verbally accosts the great Bhīṣma (repeatedly), who does all he can to defend the Kurus in all the might that an older man has left. Bhīṣma calls the insults “wordy daggers,” and the scene is one of profound emotional pain and disrespect.<sup>1248</sup> Later in the *Droṇa Parvan*, Bhīma verbally blasts Arjuna for his “wordy darts” when he protests over the manner of Droṇa’s death.<sup>1249</sup> Though it causes deep anguish, sorrow, and resentment, a “wordy dart” to the heart is not a wound to the ontological nature of the soul (*ātman*).

Therefore, is such a thing a ‘soul wound’ in the *Mhbn* war? According to the *Bg*, the answer to the question is an unequivocal ‘no.’ There is no soul wound from the perspective of the *Bg*. No ‘soul’ was injured at Kurukṣetra. Bodies burned, and heads rolled, but there was no possibility of a soul wound. Counter to ECTL, Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* responded directly against Arjuna’s misperception

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<sup>1247</sup> Tick, Edward, *Warrior’s Return: Restoring the Soul After War*, 144.

<sup>1248</sup> Ganguli, *Bhīṣma Parvan*, LVIII. See also Sikhandin’s “wordy daggers” toward Bhīṣma who refuses to fight him, having been born a woman in a former life, CIX, 275. See also Karna mocking Sahadeva as an unequal, *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXVI, 384

<sup>1249</sup> Ganguli, *Droṇa Parvan*, CXCVIII, 464. See also, Karna mocks Sahadeva as an unequal with “wordy darts,” *Droṇa Parvan*, CLXVI, 384.

and reasoning that he could harm the soul of his family and friends. Kṛṣṇa uses specific examples of combat (*Bg* 2.23) that would destroy the body but could not harm the embodied *ātman* (*dehino*). The soul is not slain when a body is beheaded (*Bg* 2.20). The soul is not pierced when the shafts of the mighty Gāṇḍīva pierce the beating hearts of *kṣatriyas* giving their last full measure (*Bg* 2.21). The fire of the celestial *Āgneyāstra* weapon did not incinerate the souls of *kṣatriyas* as the material body lay charred upon the field. Therefore, what is damaged? What made resistance to the common guṇic combat emotions challenging to manage and endure?

I put forth that Arjuna experienced an *epistemological wound*. Arjuna’s crisis was the collapse of his faculties of perception and reason directly impacted by the *guṇas*. Killing another human being (*karmaṇighora*) always produces common nonphysical wounds of war, like grief, anger, revenge, despair, doubt, regret, abandonment of caste, feigning combat, rash oaths, war crimes, and misperception. However, remaining traumatized by nonphysical phenomena is the state of domination by the *guṇas* of passion and ignorant darkness (*rajasic/tamasic*), overpowering one’s ability to respond to the *guṇas* of truth (*sattva*). It is not a soul wound but rather a ‘soul context wound,’ or what I refer to as a ‘wound’ to the epistemological faculties of a human being. The experiences of *karmaṇighora* and the powerful guṇic emotions are like interference with a strong signal. The signal becomes intermittent and unreliable. The depictions of long-lasting sorrow, doubt, despair, anger, anxiety, fear, mistrust, dislike of the public, and regret simply *feel* like a soul wound.

Moreover, it may be identified and researched as a moral injury, but interchanging the terms can confuse definitions. It is possible that interchanging the terms does not respect the particularities of the phenomena. In Arjuna’s context, he again experienced his resistance to

severing all attachment to all that encompasses combat as the *guṇic* tides come and go. I return to John P. Wilson’s insightful quote in full,

The identity of the posttraumatic self reflects alterations and reconfigurations of its inner structural dimensions and the psychological process they govern. The architecture of the self is altered by trauma and, in extreme cases, the entire infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented with a new design. The survivor faces the reality of how emotionally infused traumatic exposure has altered their sense of well-being, values, and views of life.<sup>1250</sup>

In *Bg* 1.20-2.9, we see an “extreme case” of what may be what Wilson describes as an “architecture of the self” needing to be “rearranged, reconstructed, and reinvented with a new design.” The onslaught of the *guṇas* storming the gates of his “inner structural dimensions” and the “psychological process they govern” is the challenge to remaining indifferent (*same*) in combat as a single-minded devotee. The *guṇas* block a “psychological process” here, undermining the mental “architecture” there.

But, it cannot be an assault on the soul, for Kṛṣṇa quickly eliminated that possibility in *Bg* 2.17. The phenomenon has been popularized as a ‘soul wound,’ but Wilson’s definition lends itself to be an *epistemological* “alteration.” I suggest Arjuna’s “entire [epistemological] infrastructure” was “altered.” Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* was the *temporal* “reconfiguration” of Arjuna’s “structural dimensions.”

However, the scene in *Bg* 1 is not entirely negative. Arjuna’s immediate response following the opening crisis symbolized hope. The *guṇas* greatly hindered him, but they could not prevent him from quieting himself, sitting on his chariot, and then making the request of Kṛṣṇa, *śādhī māṃ*, (“correct me/re-order”). Arjuna’s crisis was an “extreme case,” but it also implied that

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<sup>1250</sup> Wilson, John P., ed., *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

other *kṣatriyas* could do the same *in the thick* of combat and the fog of war, and this is what we see again and again in the days to come.

Furthermore, Wilson’s reference to how exposure to combat altered a warrior’s “sense of well-being and views of life” strikes a chord with Sañjaya’s epilogue. It calls into question the claim that wherever Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa find themselves on the battlefield, there should be (and can be) “well-being” (*bhūti*s) and “right moral conduct” (*nīti*s) along with “splendor” and “victory” (*Bg 18.78*). Translating *bhūti*s as “well-being,” rather than Sargeant’s “wealth,”<sup>1251</sup> or Fowler’s “fortune” includes the physical rewards while drawing attention to the good nonphysical elements of victory. Sañjaya’s epilogue associates these four realities with the sure success of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa’s presence. However, is this the case on the battlefield? It is not. There appears to be very little “well-being” in combat by those who do the deadly work.

Tsoukalas renders *bhūti*s as “guidance” but comments that the four qualities together generally convey the sense of “for the good of the person.”<sup>1252</sup> See also Feuerstein.<sup>1253</sup> The importance of guidance is substantiated by the many examples of Kṛṣṇa repeatedly reinforcing Arjuna’s purpose to fight and kill.<sup>1254</sup> It is the temporal end goal of his pre-war promise and the ultimate means of *mokṣa*.

Nonetheless, the *Bg* ends spectacularly on the surface, leaving the reader to presume all will be well, but a darker story is rising over Kurukṣetra. The *kṣatriyas* on the field could not kill and escape nonphysical postcombat trauma, and very few humans could. Dave Grossman explains that only 2% of warriors commit most of the killing in war. According to the American Psychiatric

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<sup>1251</sup> Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 739; Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 303.

<sup>1252</sup> Tsoukalas, *Bhagavadgītā*, vi, 491.

<sup>1253</sup> Feuerstein, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, 473.

<sup>1254</sup> See *Bg* 2.18; 3.30; 8.7; 11.34.



Association, they are sociopaths who “have no remorse about the effects of their behavior on others.”<sup>1255</sup> In this context, being diagnosed as a sociopath does not mean one is dangerous to society. It means the other 98% of combatants struggle to some degree.<sup>1256</sup> *Karmaṇīghora* may be the means of a “sanctioned fight” (*dhārmyaṃ saṅgrāmaṃ*), but it will inevitably produce nonphysical trauma in and after combat. But it is not a wound to the soul. It is the deconstruction of a warrior’s epistemological framework.

In closing, if Arjuna is a universal symbol (and I think he is), post-*karmaṇīghora* nonphysical trauma *should* be the expectation of combat. It is simply the reality of the age. Fortunately, despite the *dharma* odds stacked against Arjuna, he remains able to hear and understand Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* and be reordered for combat readiness. In the worst possible experience of combat, Kṛṣṇa never left Arjuna’s side, and no matter how much the *guṇas* have deconstructed Arjuna’s ability to see and understand the battlefield and know the reality of war, his means of liberation is a single request away. *Śādhī mām Kṛṣṇa*.

### **Areas for Further Potential Impact**

The battle is over, and the war is won, but now begins the long-lasting, often day-to-day, assaults of trauma on the survivor’s interior life. The perspective of the *Mhba* is that all *kṣatriyas* struggle to endure the devastating impact of the *guṇas* of war. In this thesis, we have answered the primary research question, and we concluded that Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhī* might restore an ineffective combat *kṣatriya*. Still, no preparation inoculates one from nonphysical combat trauma. There is no wound to the soul in the *Bg* and the *Mhba*. Based on the narrated accounts, the nonphysical trauma

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<sup>1255</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 183.

<sup>1256</sup> Most struggle but many veterans report a sense of post-traumatic growth despite or due to their battle.

of Kurukṣetra caused misperception, ill reason, and the failure to discern the reality of the battlefield. Arjuna may have felt as if his soul was wounded, but, in those moments, he must remember the powerful impact of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhī*.

Arjuna's odyssey continued beyond the war to the end of his life, as well as the struggles of other primary characters, e.g., Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira. In the following sections (9.3-4), I will conclude this project by exploring Dhṛtarāṣṭra's immediate afterwar experience in the *Stri Parvan* and show how my conclusions impact ECTL relating to making sense of one's participation in combat and veteran suicide.

Vaiśampāyana narrates the account to Arjuna's great-grandson, Janamejaya, many years after *Kurukṣetra*. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was neither a combatant nor a direct witness, yet, he experienced how the *guṇas* of war disordered the "equilibrium of the self."<sup>1257</sup> I have chosen his experience over others, obviously Arjuna's story, because of its proximity to the fight and Sañjaya's and Vyāsa's response to multiple types of phenomena. Though a minor character of the epic's great war, his experience in the *Stri Parvan* illustrated the expansive impact of *karmaṇighora*. The toll of the war has broken Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and the only path to recovery is the reconstruction of the "architecture" sustaining the dynamic faculties which make up the context of his *ātman*. The deconstruction of his epistemological faculties resulted in his confusion (*moha*s). Sañjaya applied the concepts of Kṛṣṇa's *śādhī* to the same pattern of disorder/order, combat ineffectiveness/readiness, allowing the king to rightly perceive and accept reality and then move beyond the war. Yet, in a few chapters, he reverts to his temporary crisis's root cause, rendering himself again disordered and combat ineffective. As I have before, I will continue to overlay this passage through the lens of John P. Wilson, specifically, the following line, "The architecture of

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<sup>1257</sup> Wilson, *The Post-Traumatic Self*, 11.

the self is altered by trauma and, in extreme cases, the entire infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented with a new design.”<sup>1258</sup>

### 9.3 Sorrow, Guilt, Regret, and Meaningless Mission

In *The Untold War*, Nancy Sherman addresses various dimensions of postcombat guilt that soldiers carry away from that battlefield. Guilt, Sherman writes, is “often a testament to a sense of moral accountability,” an “expression of personal responsibility.”<sup>1259</sup> Guilt is a “self-indictment of having harmed or violated or betrayed another,” and it matters not if it is rational or irrational or directly or indirectly caused by the soldier. In her interviews, she found that veterans were not desensitized to killing based on their participation, but quite the contrary. Though it was often the unspoken subject in the room, soldiers struggled with what they could or should not have done. She observed that they carried (felt) a “tremendous weight” because of their actions, even if their survival was simply a matter of luck.<sup>1260</sup> Guilt is a common denominator among soldiers, a genuine “moral remainder” of their humanity after killing in combat, a “reasonable reaction to being a human and having a humanity.”<sup>1261</sup> Guilt could be a positive emotion because one may argue that the soldier with no guilt is missing an inherent component of humanity. Like a conscience, the feeling of guilt points a post-combatant to their need for therapy and healing. However, in the *Mhba*, guilt is not a virtue. Dhṛtarāṣṭra feels guilty, and his guilt is the fruit of his ongoing sorrowful regret over the outcome of the war. Sorrowful regret/guilt (*śoka*) never seems to leave Dhṛtarāṣṭra

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<sup>1258</sup> Wilson, *The Post-Traumatic Self*, 9.

<sup>1259</sup> Sherman, Nancy, *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of our Soldiers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 91.

<sup>1260</sup> Sherman, *The Untold War*, 92.

<sup>1261</sup> Sherman, *The Untold War*, 93.

altogether though he claims it so. Instead, Śoka drives Dhṛtarāṣṭra to deeper levels of confusion and despair.

### 9.3.1 *Stri Parvan*, 1-3: *nāsti niṣphalatū raṇe*: “There is no fruitless [act] in battle”

In *Stri Parvan* 3, Dhṛtarāṣṭra confidently confesses that he is finally free from his tear-filled loss of control, claiming, *śoko 'yaṃ vigato mama*, “my sorrowful regret has been removed.”<sup>1262</sup> Dhṛtarāṣṭra substantiated his restored perception “through [Sañjaya’s] counsel, great wisdom” (*subhāṣitair mahāprājña*).<sup>1263</sup> The construction of his declaration is identical to Arjuna’s declaration in *Bg* 11.1, *moho 'yaṃ vigato mama*, “my confusion/delusion is gone.” Arjuna’s confusion (*mohas*) stemmed from his emotional, familial love, and loyalty (attachment) moments before he must kill his kin and beloved teachers.<sup>1264</sup> Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s experience of sorrowful regret and guilt occurred *as* he considered his culpability in the destruction of all the *kṣatriyas*. Specifically, he mourns the loss of his 100 sons, primarily his eldest, Duryodhana. Though Dhṛtarāṣṭra was a spectator, he experienced the same traumas as Arjuna experienced off and on throughout the war. Furthermore, as Arjuna’s declaration is the direct response to Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* (*Bg* 1-10), Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s declaration is the immediate response to the core message 18 days after the morning of the *Bg* (*Stri Parvan* 1-2). The latter’s restoration and confident statement testify to the continued efficacy of Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi* throughout and beyond the war.

In the opening scene of the *Stri Parvan*, the old king is distraught with grief, regret, and a condemning conscience. He recounts how he has lost his one hundred sons and caused the

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<sup>1262</sup> Ganjuli, *Stri Parvan*, 3.1.

<sup>1263</sup> Ganjuli, *Stri Parvan* 3.1. *Subhāṣitair* can mean “counsel.” See Monier Monier Williams, 1229.

<sup>1264</sup> See Chapter 5.6.

catastrophic war. Still, Sañjaya questions his self-pity and the uselessness of grieving over the many thousands of brave *kṣatriyas* who fulfilled their duty and gave their lives in *dharma* service. Dhṛtarāṣṭra continued to admit his wrongdoing, his stubborn refusal to heed good counsel, and how he must now repent. He also assumed that he must have committed a heinous act in a former life if this was the end of his present life. Sañjaya cuts off his self-loathing by speaking frankly concerning his grave leadership error in not brokering a compromise granting Duryodhana all but a handful of the Kuru realm. Sañjaya tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra that repentance is required, but grief is not necessary. Grief has the opposite effect compared to the reference to Sherman above. Sorrow and grief in the *Mhba* over one's required duty is not a virtue or an indication that one still retains a shadow of one's humanity. Succumbing to the sway of *rajasic guṇas* is a sign one is moving away from liberation, becoming entrapped by the lure of ignorant darkness (*tamasic guṇas*). Indulging in grief impedes fortune, recovery, and spiritual health. Grief after the war is pointless besides its initial drive to repentance. According to Sañjaya, only a fool would go into battle and mourn the loss of so many fallen men.<sup>1265</sup> In other words, what different outcome should one expect? The hope for any *kṣatriya* is a good death, a clean kill, an honorable sacrifice. This is the way.

In response to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who is “contemplating sorrowful regret” (*śokaṃ vicinvatas*), Sañjaya simply says, “cast off [your] sorrowful regret” (*śokaṃ rājan vyapanuda*).<sup>1266</sup> The king has “heard the vedas” (*śrutās te veda*); therefore, he may infer he was merely momentarily disordered.<sup>1267</sup> While *śoka* caused him to consider himself no longer a source of wisdom to humanity, while he considered his life pointless because of the destruction of his kingdom and the

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<sup>1265</sup> Sañjaya uses the metaphor of a man who places a burning ember in his lap and does not expect to be burnt. That person is ignorant of his actions (i.e., feeling guilty and purposeless). *Stri Parvan*, 2.

<sup>1266</sup> Granguli, *Stri Parvan*, 1.21-22. For , *vyapanuda* see Monier-Williams, 1031.

<sup>1267</sup> *śrutās* is a past passive participle.

*kṣatriya* caste, Sañjaya counters his reasoning with the truth that all beings are destined for death (*Stri Parvan*, 3). One cannot prevent the ordained plan of all things, and the material nature of all beings is temporal. Kurukṣetra’s purpose was to provide a location whereby *kṣatriyas* could seal their destiny toward liberation. The war dead are to be admired.

### 9.3.2 Thinking About Sorrowful Regret After War and the Senselessness of Slaughter

War is never meaningless. Appropriately sanctioned combat always has a purpose. When a *kṣatriya* understands his epistemological “infrastructure has to be rearranged, reconstructed, or reinvented,” he may perform his *dharma*.<sup>1268</sup> The moment the king or commander/officer realizes this truth, he understands Sañjaya’s summation of the positive purpose of combat, “there is no fruitless act in battle” (*nāsti niṣphalatā raṇe*).<sup>1269</sup> The idea that there is no wasted act in war is akin to Edward Tick’s differentiation of two archetypes, warrior and soldier. A soldier is an efficient and minimally trained person fulfilling their small role in a complex war machine, easily replaced and sacrificed. Their uniforms are indistinguishable. However, a warrior’s initiation sets them apart for a lifetime of service in that role in the community, connected to a noble tradition endowed with ancient wisdom.<sup>1270</sup> The *Mhba* provides a combat context whereby contemporary warriors may understand the vital role of the *kṣatriya* in battle and society. They were never without purpose, and, in fact, the absence of this caste results in lawlessness. Contemporary warriors could understand that their efforts and sacrifices are part of a larger purpose, and winning fame and honor are noble enterprises. Each fighting man and woman has a unique destiny that must pass through the crucible of carnage, even if their purpose serves society long after their experiences in combat.

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<sup>1268</sup> Wilson, *The Post-Traumatic Self*, 9.

<sup>1269</sup> Ganguli, *Stri Parvan*, 2.

<sup>1270</sup> Tick, *Warrior and the Soul*, 182ff.

Suppose the combat veteran can remember that their soul is preserved during their trauma, that feelings of sorrow, guilt, and purposelessness are real yet of no ultimate value. In that case, they may endure their day-to-day trials honorably and with integrity. There are no wasted lives because each victory or death may be the means to heaven.

#### **9.4 Afterwar, Moral Injury, and Suicide**

Life after war remains a war for many combat veterans. Grief, guilt, sorrow, and regret do not cease to confuse one's ability to perceive and know reality in peacetime. Brock and Lettini note that the loss of meaning and the willpower not to give up one's life is one of the top threats of moral injury.<sup>1271</sup> As the effect of multi-faceted trauma accumulates, a warrior slowly succumbs to the siege upon his life. Figley and Nash identify several "stressors" that lead to Combat Stress Injury. Several of those stressors are relevant to Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

For example, Figley and Nash identify the stress of *shame* and *guilt*.<sup>1272</sup> Dhṛtarāṣṭra may have been experiencing survivor guilt, having heard the account of the perishing of his 100 sons. Ironically, survivor guilt is often more traumatizing when an enlisted man or officer escapes from combat victorious. In addition, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was *helpless* beyond his missed opportunity to avoid the war. As a passive recipient of the extensively detailed accounts, he had no recourse and no ability to change the battle's outcome. The details were significant because witnessing the horrors of carnage is traumatizing. The greater the identification with the "damaged person," the more influential the negative impact on the warrior's "sense of invulnerability."<sup>1273</sup> Finally, spiritual stressors challenge one's specific faith tradition or the basic concept of theism. How could a loving

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<sup>1271</sup> Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 80.

<sup>1272</sup> Figley and Nash, ed., *Combat Stress Injury*, 25-26.

<sup>1273</sup> Figley and Nash, ed., *Combat Stress Injury*, 27. See Chapter 4.

and good God allow Kurukṣetra when God has all the power to prevent it? Ultimately, a warrior may not be able to forgive an offender or receive forgiveness from one offended.<sup>1274</sup>

While Figley and Nash approach afterwar trauma through combat stressors, their research falls within the discussion of moral injury. The cumulative burden of these stressors appears unbearable, and the combat veteran experiences a dark depressive ‘funk’, eventually leading to despair and, possibly, suicide. The origin of this interior decline is increasingly linked to active and passive participation in a moral injury. Rob Sutherland reminds us that those who experience moral injury feel betrayed (nation, leadership, evil acts), but those who perpetrate moral injury feel guilt and shame.<sup>1275</sup> Referring to Bret Litz’s research, everyone deployed experiences a level of moral injury in their “inner being.”<sup>1276</sup> When left unchecked, unacknowledged, and unhealed, many veterans opt for suicide. Douglas Pryor makes an important point that will be challenged by the account of Dhṛtarāṣṭra immediately following the war. Pryor notes the alarming lack of interest by some in military leadership to explore the amassing anecdotal evidence supporting moral injury as a root cause of much maladaptive behavior, including suicide. He reminds us that it is not if leadership believes warriors committed or experienced moral injury; it is if the warriors “believe they perpetrated or *witnessed*” a morally injurious incident.<sup>1277</sup> While Dhṛtarāṣṭra shared these stressors, the means of his recovery differed, and Vyāsa will re-order and reconstruct the blind king’s perception of what happened at Kurukṣetra. Once Dhṛtarāṣṭra understood the bigger picture, he understood that even his immoral leadership became the means

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<sup>1274</sup> Figley and Nash, ed., *Combat Stress Injury*, 28-29. Positive response, combat growth, is also common.

<sup>1275</sup> Sutherland, Rob, in Frame, *Moral Injury*, 197.

<sup>1276</sup> Sutherland, Rob, in Frame, *Moral Injury*, 200.

<sup>1277</sup> Pryor, “What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk about War,” in Meagher and Douglas Pryor, *War and Moral Injury*, 60.



to Kurukṣetra’s ultimate end. After his interior “infrastructure” was “rearranged” to Kṛṣṇa’s reality, he decided to forgo ending his life.

#### 9.4.1 *Stri Parvan*, 3-8: *prajñāmbhasā*: The Medicine of Wisdom

In *Stri Parvan* 8, Dhṛtarāṣṭra confessed that the traumatic impact of sorrowful regret is too much to “bear” (*dhārayiṣyāmy*). After “considering” (*vacannam*) several of Vyāsa’s similes and metaphors about the ongoing struggle of life after war, he changed his mind, declaring he will not end his life and will go forward and “not live in sorrowful regret” (*na śocitum*). The *Bg* contains the same root verb in *Bg* 2.25, 26, 27 when Kṛṣṇa explains what Arjuna *should not* be doing, “You should not mourn” (in the infinitive, *śocitum*).<sup>1278</sup> In *Stri Parvan* 3, Vidura likened life to be like a fruit tree that cannot withstand the forces of nature, like a wild and dangerous wilderness (*Stri Parvan*, 5-6), and *mokṣa* as a chariot with a driver and horses (*Stri Parvan*, 7).

Vidura explained that temporal, physical existence is like a life-cycle of a stout banana tree (Ganguli). All creatures exist moments above the fires of their physical destruction at the end of the *yuga*. After all, death may come at any moment in life. Death is the great equalizer, and everyone must live with the consequences of their actions, including the actions of their previous embodied lives. However, the soul is eternal. Vidura then mixes the similes of a potter throwing a clay plot and a swimmer who dives into a lake into his reasoning. The pot (our earthly bodies) may break at any stage. Swimmers dive into the deep, but not all make it back to the surface. The unwise reap the fruit of their evil actions, while the wise and kind reap the rewards of their good efforts. Vidura ends with the statement that the wise who “stand in the true [knowledge] of the end of the cycle of all temporal existence” attain the “supreme goal” (*paramāṃ gatim*, see *Bg* 6.45; 9.32;

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<sup>1278</sup> *anu* + √*śuc*.

16.22, 23).<sup>1279</sup> Essentially, Arjuna has been deceived (like all other humans) by the desires of this world (e.g., fear, anger, covetousness), in this case, common postcombat traumas. He was admonished to be like the wise. The elderly and wise *kṣatriyas* look back over their lives, and, in time, those who seek the truth behind what appears to be reality will transcend their turmoils (*Stri Parvan*, 4). Vidura states, “therefore, knowing all this, he who follows truth, king, he obtains *mokṣa* [in the many different] paths.”<sup>1280</sup>

Vidura continues with the simile of the “deep forest of the cycle of life.”<sup>1281</sup> However, given the combat context, I have the option of distress for *gahana*, the “distressing cycle of life.” The story continued.

Once, a brahmin entered a deep and wild forest, and he discovered terrifying animals and objects there, e.g., roaring lions, tigers, and elephants. When he entered, he lost his senses—hair stood on its end (like Arjuna)—and he desperately ran in every direction seeking shelter. There was no escape from the haunting creatures. As he studied the forest, he noticed that monstrous five-headed snakes surrounded it, but a great woman extended her arms and encompassed the forest in a large net. Eventually, the brahmin fell into the center of the forest, whereby he hung upside down, entangled in the vines and branches. He beheld a great snake at the bottom of the pit and a six-faced, dark elephant and bees working to gather their honey in their combs. Great streams of honey oozed downward from those combs, of which the man continuously drank but could not satisfy his thirst. Black and white rats began gnawing at the tree's root, and all the creatures mentioned above became distressed, even the brahmin, who still could not become indifferent to

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<sup>1279</sup> *sthitāḥ satye saṃsārānta.*

<sup>1280</sup> *evaṃ sarvaṃ viditvā vai yas tattvam anuvartate  
sa pramokṣāya labhate panthānaṃ manuḷādhīpa.*

<sup>1281</sup> *saṃsāragahanaṃ.* See Monier-Williams, 352. In the *Mhba*, *gahana* can mean pain and distress.

his surroundings (*Stri Parvan*, 5). Upon hearing this tale, Dhṛtarāṣṭra eagerly sought to know its meaning.

Vidura explained. Those wise to the path of *mokṣa* know that the great forest is the world and everything in it, the thick interior is the sphere of one's life, and the diverse and frightening creatures are disease and calamities. The great woman is age which steals everyone's youth, beauty, and vitality, and the pit is one's physical body, the snake in the pit being time, the universal destroyer. The vines are the desires one has for life and the good things of life. The elephant is the calendar, and the gnawing rats are the days counting down to death. The bees and their honey are the normal desires of a man's life which can never satisfy one who craves them (*Stri Parvan*, 6). Vidura's point is that no man escapes the toils of this world and the consequences of his actions in his prior lives. Though one may escape an early death or disease, one cannot escape time that withers all beings down in the end. Only indifference to all life experiences ceases the repetition of birth, death, and rebirth—those who do not are trapped. Everything in life, good or bad, are “messengers of death” for they should point to the body's death *for* that life.<sup>1282</sup>

Mixing images, Vidura concludes with the more familiar image of life as a chariot with horses. The body is the car, the driver is the soul, the horses are desires, the ruts of the chariot are actions, and they who chase after the horses are trapped in the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. Those who show indifference to the desires of the world (and traumas like disease and sorrow) ride in Yama's chariot (death) toward liberation and peace. Vidura then makes the application, telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the ignorant receive what you received—pain and suffering, the loss of one's kingdom and family, and the domination of desires. However, the wise apply the “medicine of intelligence”

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<sup>1282</sup> Ganguli's translation.

to all “great grief.”<sup>1283</sup> Vidura instructed the king that friends and family cannot kill sorrow as effectively as “a self-restrained soul.”<sup>1284</sup> However, upon hearing these words, Dhṛtarāṣṭra fell into more profound despair, concluding that he must end his life.

In that moment, Vyāsa intervened and shared the backstory of the destruction of the *kṣatriyas*. He retold how all that happened was ordained and could not be prevented. Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s wicked sons reaped their fixation on jealousy and evil counsel. His destiny was foretold by Viṣṇu in Indra’s court when the latter spoke of Duryodhana’s ordained destruction. Therefore, there is no need to mourn what cannot be prevented. Humans cannot escape becoming entangled in the vines of attachment.

Vyāsa retold this story for the explicit purpose of restoring Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s ability to become indifferent to the “unquenchable fire” (*hutāśam jvalitam*) of the “sorrow produced [by losing] sons” (*putraśokasamutpannam*).<sup>1285</sup> Yet, the veiled reality had already been made known to him in Indra’s court long before. Therefore, Vyāsa is simply retelling what had been momentarily confused in the aftermath of the war. Like Kṛṣṇa’s *śādhi*, Duryodhana’s fate was the “medicine of wisdom” (*prajñāmbhasā*)<sup>1286</sup> that would soon “extinguish” (*nirvāpaya*) the attachment to sorrowful grief, disordering his perception, reason, and royal composure, reversing his decision to commit suicide. The scene is reminiscent of Kṛṣṇa’s words in *Bg* 5.10 when he taught Arjuna that he would not be contaminated by the fruit of his actions when, like a wise yogin, he cuts away his attachment to the consequences of his combat actions, entrusting all that he does to Brahman (and the fate of *karma*). Like a lotus pedal floats on water, surrounded “by water,” he, though he exists

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<sup>1283</sup> Ganguli’s translation.

<sup>1284</sup> Ganguli’s translations.

<sup>1285</sup> See Ganguli, *Stri Parvan*, 8.44.

<sup>1286</sup> *prajñāmbhasā* is instrumental, hence, “by the means of medicine of intelligence.”

and acts as part of the created order, does not contaminate himself by the unavoidable actions within his combat context.

#### 9.4.2 Life Afterwar, Veteran Suicide, and the Combat Context

There is an inescapable world of suffering exacerbated by violent, gory combat. Well documented, no one returns from war unchanged, and the long-lasting trauma, specifically moral injury, blame, and guilt, appear to be a driving force of veteran suicide over the pasts twenty years. However, Vyāsa provides an answer that (at least momentarily) halts a veteran suicide. As has been well documented by now, Kṛṣṇa's *sādhi* can reorder a disordered warrior, but it never wholly inoculates one to *karmanighora*. Consistent with ECTL, Dhṛtarāṣṭra recognizes the inescapable temptation to mourn his lost sons, but he vows to fulfill his caste-dictated *dharma* without “giving into to sorrowful regret” (*na śocitum*).<sup>1287</sup> Based on the backstory of Kurukṣetra in *Stri Parvan*, 8, Dhṛtarāṣṭra knew what was happening. Still, *śoka* delivered such an “extreme” trauma to his epistemological architecture, Vyāsa was forced to “reorganize” the interior infrastructure that processes perception and controls reasoning. Vyāsa did not “reinvent” his function to perceive and understand the reality of the combat context. He reconceptualized it. Applied to ECTL, it is a possible option for why and how to stop the present epidemic of veteran suicide.

Moral injuries, from this perspective, have temporal consequences but cannot damage the soul; therefore, they are not soul wounds. Yet, one cannot be ultimately accountable for their actions, for actions of this life are the playing out of the fruit of a past life, and it is the *guṇas* that cause one to commit a moral injury, not the soul.

Regarding suicide, warriors should never mourn their lost brothers and sisters or regret their sanctioned *kṣatriya*-caste duty. Their deaths are proper deaths that may lead them to heaven,

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<sup>1287</sup> See Ganguli, *Stri Parvan*, 8.47

and the grieving warrior's survival may be their path to heaven. Taking one's life is an adverse action that will reap consequences in the next embodied life. In *Stri Parvan*, 1-8, the dominating reason is that Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu ordained the deaths of others. Like oneself, all beings are headed to death, some sooner than others. Knowledge of the backstory to reality is the primary balm to postcombat trauma. In this perspective, mourning and regretting killing are wasted efforts. Suicide is a waste of focus, for it is an example of being entangled in the vines of desiring temporal satisfaction. Death by combat is to be treated indifferently. Ultimately, suicide is an unsanctioned *a-dharma* act that does not appear to lead to *mokṣa*, for its cause is born out of an attachment to the dead or maligned. Being the case, the cycle of birth-death-rebirth means that this is not your 'one and done' life. You have innumerable lives, but the danger is that the lust for 'sweet honey' may cause one to cycle away from *mokṣa*.

From this perspective, confusion, not blame, not regret, or guilt, caused the poet, Michael F. Lepore, to reflect upon meeting a grieving mother looking for answers to her son's death. Lepore writes,

He hates the enemy for pulling the trigger,  
for challenging him to fix what they destroyed.  
He hates himself for not being able to stop it.

If he could just disappear, become invisible,  
fill his mind with something other  
than memories.<sup>1288</sup>

According to the *Mbhn* combat context, the ability to constantly repair one's besieged epistemological function to perceive and rightly understand reality, to remain indifferent to what

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<sup>1288</sup> Lepore, Michael F, "Haunted," in *Moral Injury: A Vietnam War Journey of Moral and Spiritual Confusion* (West Hartford: Grayson Books, 44).

one then understands as common, temporary combat phenomena, is the key to remaining combat ready and remain combat effective with a single-minded, caste-dictated, *dharma*-combat mode of worship. In the end, the violent, gory combat prescribed by Kṛṣṇa's *sādhī* most likely is not the most challenging task. The most difficult task is the long-lasting day-to-day impact on *kṣatriyas*, winning and losing and patiently enduring the slow siege of nonphysical postcombat trauma, knowing what one feels is born out of momentary confusion, determining to live out the rest of their life not indulging in sorrowful regret. I hope that scholars after me may go beyond what I have found in this thesis and work toward the common goal that modern-day warriors may declare with Arjuna, even with the blind king, Dhṛtarāṣṭra,

*ahaṃ prāṇān yaśiṣye ca na śocitum*

I will not distress my life and succumb to sorrowful regret.





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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Bg 11.1-54

Arjuna’s Double-Request; Kṛṣṇa ’s Double Command: “Behold my Cosmic Form; Behold, this, my (prior four-armed avatar) Form”

BG 11.1-45					BG 11.46-54			
1-4 Arjuna requests to “see” Kṛṣṇa ’s Cosmic Form	5-45 Arjuna responds to Kṛṣṇa ’s question from 10.42 by requesting to see Kṛṣṇa ’s princely or cosmic form—to see Kṛṣṇa unveiled in his universality. Kṛṣṇa grants this request with a gift of divine sight, whereby, Arjuna rightly makes a universal call to Kṛṣṇa worship.				46 Arjuna requests to “see” Kṛṣṇa ’s avatar form	47-54 The <i>rupamaisvaram</i> is overwhelming. Arjuna is unmoored (appropriately out of knowledge and a unique divine experience in contrast to his despondency from ignorance in BG 1-2) and thus requests Kṛṣṇa to return to his prior four-armed avatar self. However, Arjuna must no long see Kṛṣṇa as his divine power illusionates before the ignorant, but, see Kṛṣṇa in the world as the <i>rupamaisvaram</i> eternally working in the world. This is the ultimate reshaping epistemological experience for combat which justifies Kṛṣṇa ’s command for him to kill on the battle field for he as Kṛṣṇa has already killed them.		
1-4 Request to See the Cosmic Form	5-14 Behold the <i>Rupamaisvaram</i>	15-31 Response & Admission	32-34 (35) Kṛṣṇa ’s Response	36-45 Universal Declaration of Worship	46 Request to see Kṛṣṇa as four-armed form (prior form)	47-49 (50) Kṛṣṇa , “Behold this form” (prior avatar form)	51 Arjuna re-stored; combat-effective	52-54 Kṛṣṇa ’s Concludes

Literary Structure	<i>Rūpamaiśvara</i>	<i>Rūpeṇa Caturbhujena</i>
Arjuna Requests	<i>Icchāmi, darśaya</i> (v1-3, 4)	<i>Icchāmi, Bhava</i> (v46)
Kṛṣṇa Commands	<i>paśya</i> (v5, 6, 7, 8)	<i>Bhava; prapaśya</i> (47-49)
Vision	Lordly/Universal Form (v9-30)	Four-armed Form (v50)
Arjuna's Response	Who are you? How do you work?(v31)	Declaration of Restoration (v51)
Kṛṣṇa's Response	Identity & Agency (v32)	Exclusive of Vision (v52-53)
Kṛṣṇa's Declaration	Imperative for Co-mission (v33-34)	Means for Co-mission (v54-55)
	Central Message of <i>The Bg</i> : Arjuna's act of worship (v35-46) is combat (v33-34) through "single-minded devotion" to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's "work"	