

# **BHAGAVAD GITA**

## **The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium**

### **Appendix**

Translations and commentaries  
by Parama Karuna Devi

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phone: +91 94373 00906

E-mail: paramakaruna@aol.in

Website: [www.jagannathavallabha.com](http://www.jagannathavallabha.com)

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Correspondence address:

PAVAN House

Siddha Mahavira patana,

Puri 752002 Orissa

# Gita mahatmya

by Adi Shankara

## VERSE 1

गीताशास्त्रमिदं पुण्यं यः पठेत्प्रयतः पुमान् ।  
विष्णोः पदमवान्पोति भयशोकादिवर्जितः ॥१॥

*gītā śāstram idam puṇyam,  
yaḥ paṭhet prayataḥ pumān  
viṣṇoḥ padam avāpnoti,  
bhaya śokādi varjitaḥ*

*gita: Bhagavad gita; sastram: the holy scripture; idam: this; punyam: accruing religious and karmic merits; yah: one who; pathet: reads; prayatah: when departed; puman: a human being; visnoh: of Vishnu; padam: the feet; avapnoti: attains; bhaya: fear; soka adi: sadness etc; varjitaḥ: completely free.*

**This holy scripture called *Bhagavad gita* is (the source of) great religious and karmic merits. One who reads it leaves (the materialistic delusion, the imprisonment of *samsara*, etc)/ after leaving (this body, at the time of death) attains the abode of Vishnu, free from fear and sadness.**

VERSE 2

गीताध्ययनशीलस्य प्राणायामपरस्य च ।  
नैव सन्ति हि पापानि पूर्वजन्मकृतानि च ॥२॥

*gītādhyayana-sīlasya,  
prāṇāyāma parasya ca  
naiva santi hi pāpāni,  
pūrva janma kṛtāni ca*

*gita adhyayana:* by systematic study of *Bhagavad gita*; *silasya:* by one who is well behaved; *pranayama:* controlling the life energy; *parasya:* of the Supreme; *ca:* and; *na eva:* certainly not; *santi:* there will be; *hi:* indeed; *papani:* bad actions; *purva:* previous; *janma:* lifetimes; *krtani:* performed; *ca:* even.

**By systematically studying the *Bhagavad gita*, chapter after chapter, one who is well behaved and controls his/ her life energy is engaged in the Supreme. Certainly such a person becomes free from all bad activities, including those developed in previous lifetimes.**

VERSE 3

मलनिर्मोचनं पुंसां जलस्नानं दिने दिने ।  
सकृद्गीतास्भसि स्नानं संसारमलनाशनम् ॥३॥

*malanir mocanam pumsām,  
jala-snānam dine dine  
sakṛd-gītāmbhasi snānam,  
saṁsāra-mala-nāśanam*

*malanir:* from impurities; *mocanam:* liberation; *pumsam:* a human being; *jala:* water; *snanam:* taking bath; *dine dine:* every day;

*sakrid*: once only; *gita ambhasi*: in the waters of the *Bhagavad gita*; *snanam*: taking bath; *samsara*: the cycle of conditioned life; *mala*: contamination; *nasanam*: is destroyed.

**A human being can cleanse him/ herself from impurities by taking bath every day, but if s/he takes bath even once only in the waters of *Bhagavad gita*, the contamination of conditioned life will be destroyed.**

#### VERSE 4

गीता सुगीता कर्तव्या किमन्यैः शास्त्रविस्तरैः ।  
या स्वयं पद्मनाभस्य मुखपद्माद्विनिःसृता ॥४॥

*gītā sugītā kartavyā,*  
*kim anyaiḥ śāstra vistaraiḥ*  
*yā svayaṁ padmanābhasya,*  
*mukha-padmad viṇiḥsṛtā*

*gita*: *Bhagavad gita*; *su gita*: wonderful song/ properly chanted; *kartavya*: a duty to be performed; *kim*: what; *anyaiḥ*: other; *sastra*: scriptures; *vistaraiḥ*: a great variety; *yah*: that; *svayam*: himself; *padma nabhasya*: of the Lord Padmanabha (from whose navel the universal lotus flower grows); *mukha*: from the mouth; *padmat*: like a lotus; *viṇiḥsṛta*: emanated.

**The wonderful *Bhagavad gita* should be chanted in a proper manner, as a dutiful observance. What is the need of a variety of many other scriptures, when (*Bhagavad gita*) has emanated from the lotus mouth of that same supreme Personality of God, from whose navel the universal lotus flower grows.**

## VERSE 5

भारतामृतसर्वस्वं विष्णोर्वक्त्राद्विनिःसृतम् ।  
गीतागङ्गोदकं पीत्वा पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते ॥५॥

*bhāratāmṛta sarvasvaṁ,  
viṣṇor vaktrād-viniḥsṛtam  
gītā-gaṅgodakam pītvā,  
punar janma na vidyate*

*bharata:* of the *Mahabharata*; *amrita:* the nectar; *sarvasvam:* of all; *visnoh:* of Vishnu; *vaktrat:* from the mouth; *vinihsrtam:* emanated; *gita:* *Bhagavad gita*; *ganga:* the Ganges river; *udakam:* water; *pitva:* drinking; *punah:* again; *janma:* rebirth; *na:* does not; *vidyate:* undergo.

***Bhagavad gita* is the nectar of all the extent and scope of the epic poem *Mahabharata*, and was spoken personally by Vishnu. One who (drinks this nectar) will not have to take another birth, just like one who drinks the sacred water of the Ganges.**

## VERSE 6

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः ।  
पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥६॥

*sarvopaniṣado gāvo,  
dogdhā gopāla-nandanah  
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā,  
dugdham gitāmṛtam mahat*

*sarva:* all; *upanisadah:* the *Upanishads*; *gavah:* (like a) cow; *dogdha:* the milk; *gopala:* cowherd boy; *nandanah:* (son) of Nanda; *partha:* son of Pritha (Arjuna); *vatsah:* the calf; *su dhih:*

very intelligent; *bhoktah*: who enjoy; *dugdham*: the milk; *gita*: *Bhagavad gita*; *amrtam*: the nectar; *mahat*: the great souls.

The *Upanishads* are compared to a cow, milked by Gopala, the son of Nanda, and Arjuna is like the calf (for whose love the milk is produced). The great souls who are very intelligent will enjoy this nectarean milk of *Bhagavad gita*.

### VERSE 7

एकं शास्त्रं देवकीपुत्रगीत-  
मेको देवो देवकीपुत्र एव ।  
एको मन्त्रस्तस्य नामानि यानि  
कर्माप्येकं तस्य देवस्य सेवा ॥७॥

*ekam śāstram devakī-putra-gītam,*  
*eko devo devakī-putra eva*  
*eko mantras tasya nāmāni yāni,*  
*karmāpy ekam tasya devasya sevā*

*ekam*: one only; *sastram*: scripture; *devaki*: of Devaki; *putrah*: the son; *gitam*: *Bhagavad gita*; *ekah*: one only; *deva*: God; *devaki putrah*: the son of Devaki; *eva*: certainly; *ekah*: one only; *mantra*: *mantra*; *asya*: of him; *namani*: the many names; *yani*: those; *karma*: dutiful work; *api*: certainly; *ekam*: one only; *tasya*: of this; *devasya*: God; *seva*: the service.

Let there be one scripture only - the *Bhagavad gita* sung by Krishna, the son of Devaki. Let there be one God - this same Krishna, the son of Devaki. Let there be one *mantra* - the chant of his many names - and one duty - devotional service to him.

# The Mahabharata

*Bhagavad gita* is the first and foremost of the *prasthanas traya*, "the 3 starting points" from which one should begin to study Vedic knowledge - the other 2 are the *Upanishads* and *Vedanta sutra* or *Brahma sutra*.

*Bhagavad gita* consists of 700 verses, divided into 18 chapters (from 25 to 42) of the *Bishma parva* of the *Mahabharata* - the most voluminous epic poem in world literature: with almost 2 millions words, part in verses and part in prose, *Mahabharata* is about 4 times longer than *Ramayana* and 10 times larger than *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined.

The only complete translation of *Mahabharata* in English is the one produced by Kisari Mohan Ganguli between 1883 and 1896, but there are numerous summaries, of which the most famous was written by Rajagopalachari. Innumerable dance and drama works, especially in the east (including Bali, Thailand etc) are inspired by the stories of this epic, the most important being the Yakshagana (a dance-drama style from Karnataka) and Kathakali (a dance-drama style from Kerala). In the West, the *Mahabharata* has become famous especially through the rendition by Peter Brook, a 9 hour play that was staged for the first time in 1985 at Avignon in France, and then turned into a 5 hour movie in 1989.

The original text, written by Ganesha under Vyasa's dictation, was given by Vyasa (also called Krishna Dvaipayana) to his son Sukadeva and to his disciples Vaisampayana and Romaharshana



Suta. Romaharshana narrated it to the Rishis in Naimisharanya (a forest that was in the locality of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh) headed by Saunaka Rishi, during a sacrifice ritual that was meant to last for 1000 years. Suta gave the text to his son Ugrasrava, who had originally heard it from Vaisampayana in the assembly of Maharaja Janamejaya, Arjuna's grandson.

The core of the story, called *Jaya* and consisting of 24,000 verses, is the dialog between the regent king Dhritarastra and his advisor and charioteer Sanjaya, on what is happening on the field of Kurukshetra, before and during the battle.

According to the *Mahabharata* itself (1.1.61) and the *Asvalayana Grihasutra* (3.4.4), the other verses have been added later. Some interpret verse 1.1.81 to mean that Vyasa's original *Jaya* only had 8800 verses (from the arrival of the armies at Kurukshetra to the end of the battle) while the version recited by Vaisampayana, called *Bharata*, was 24,000 verses and the final version, called *Mahabharata* and narrated by Ugrasrava Sauti, is the one with 110,000 verses. The text is divided into 18 *Parvas* or "books", to which more minor *Parvas* were added for a total of 100 (mentioned in verse 1.2.70). Often, as an appendix to the *Mahabharata* we find the famous text *Hari vamsa*, that describes Krishna's dynasty.

The introductory verse to the original core of the *Mahabharata* recites: *narayanam namaskritya naram caiva narottamam, devim sarasvatim vyasam tato jayam udirayet*, "Before enunciating this *Jaya* we offer our homage to Narayana, to Nara (the greatest of human beings), to Sarasvati Devi and Vyasa."

The most elaborate and complete text of the *Mahabharata* begins with a "prequel" on the ancestors of the Pandavas, the relatives and friends of Krishna. It is important to understand that the Pandavas are not ordinary people, but they are direct manifestations of divine

principles, descended to this planet to assist Krishna's mission, that is described in detail in the *Bhagavata Purana* - to which the *Mahabharata* is directly connected.

The adventures of these characters can be read at many levels, from the deepest symbolism revealing the stages of the individual's spiritual realization and the blueprint of the cosmic manifestation, to the simplest and most immediate level showing how adharmic motivations, material attachments, personality defects and selfish choices produce disastrous results both individually and socially, while faithfulness to *dharma*, detachment and a proper sense of duty enable us to properly perform our work in this world. Besides, just like the Pandavas were comforted in their tribulations by the Rishis telling them the stories of great personalities that bravely faced difficulties and sufferings, we can also find solace and inspiration in their story.

We will give here a short, but clear and complete summary, that will enable the readers to understand the background and the ideological dynamics of the story.

The *Adi Parva* ("the book of the beginning") starts with the assembly of king Saunaka Kulapati, where the Rishis engaged in the sacrifice are sitting together to hear edifying stories about the great personalities of the past. Specifically, the son of Romaharshana Suta speaks of a similar assembly, called by king Janamejaya (Abhimanyu's son), where the story of the Pandavas was told. There are also some other short and deeply symbolical stories, such as those of king Pausya, Rishi Puloma and Astika (respectively occupying the *Pausya Parva*, *Puloma Parva* and *Astika Parva*),

The *Adi-vamsa-vatarana Parva* ("the book of the beginning of the dynasty") narrates that according to the pledge given by his father Pratip, emperor Santanu married Goddess Ganga, the

personification of the sacred river, generating an extraordinary son named Devavrata, who was later known as Bhishma. Because he was unable to deeply understand the divine motives and accept them without discussion, Santanu lost his extraordinary wife and after several years of unhappy solitary life he met a beautiful girl, Satyawati (who had already become the mother of Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata*), belonging to a community of fishermen on river Yamuna.

Satyavati's father was flattered by the emperor's interest, and anxious to procure the greatest possible advantage to his own family, gave his consent to the marriage only on the condition that Satyawati's sons would become the legitimate heirs instead of the eldest son Bhishma.

The young prince saw his father tortured by inner conflicts, and out of love for him he decided to renounce the imperial throne himself, and even pledged to remain a lifelong celibate so that there would be no descendants of his who could claim a right to the throne in the future. This terrible sacrifice (*bhishma* precisely means "terrible") did not just damage Bhishma's personal life, but also put the kingdom in great peril; therefore it constituted the first step towards the disastrous series of events that led to the final battle meant to eliminate the excess of the adharmic military forces on the planet and to inaugurate the age of quarrel and hypocrisy called Kali yuga ("the black age"). Thus the origin of all such disasters can clearly be traced to the greed and arrogance of Satyawati's father, to Santanu's lust and to Bhishma's material attachment towards his father, because of which he sacrificed the future of the kingdom. These are the real causes that created the unstable situation in the succession to the throne.

Satyavati's sons, Citrangada and Vicitravirya, did not have the qualities required for a king and were unable to rule the kingdom. Citrangada died very young without leaving any sons, and

Vicitravirya ascended the throne but he was so weak and impotent that the family elders sent his stepbrother Bhishma in his stead to participate to the *svayamvara* (the traditional marriage tournament among the suitors, that allowed the *kshatriya* girls to choose a suitable husband) of the princesses of Kasi (Benares) Amba, Ambika and Ambalika.

Bhishma was a powerful warrior and had no difficulties in winning the hand of all three girls, but unfortunately the eldest sister - Amba - was not happy to learn that she was going to marry Bhishma's stepbrother and not Bhishma himself. So she decided to step back from the marriage and as Bhishma allowed her to do whatever she wanted, she went to propose marriage to Shalva, another great warrior that had taken part in the *svayamvara* but had been defeated.

Shalva's hurt pride prevented him to accept the proposal and Amba was frustrated in her plans. She decided she would then propose marriage to Bhishma, who after all had won her hand in the tournament in front of all the warriors, but Bhishma had taken the lifelong celibacy vow. Furious, Amba swore to avenge the outrage and to have Bhishma killed. One after the other, all the great warriors approached by Amba for that purpose refused to engage in such an impossible venture, because everyone considered Bhishma totally invincible. In the end, Amba decided to take care of her business herself and created a new male identity for herself, becoming the adopted son of king Drupada and getting personally trained in combat with the sole purpose of killing Bhishma on the battlefield.

The other 2 princesses, Ambika and Ambalika, were still childless when Vicitravirya died prematurely of "weakness". Then Satyawati decided to resort to an old tradition, by which the brother of a deceased king could intervene personally to give a son to his sister in law - and she called her son Vyasadeva to the court.

Ambika's son Dhritarastra was born first, but he was blind, and therefore he was excluded from the succession as his handicap prevented him to effectively take part in the protection of the subjects. Ambalika's son Pandu was not very strong either; the name *pandu* means "pale" and is used in Ayurvedic medicine to describe the characteristic complexion of those who suffer from a liver condition.

Vyasa was therefore asked to beget another son, but the princesses had been unhappy about the proposal from the very start, and now they refused to cooperate any more. They sent their handmaiden instead, and she gave birth to Vidura, who was perfectly healthy and virtuous and later became *mahamantri* ("prime minister") of the kingdom, although he never personally occupied the throne.

Pandu was officially crowned the king, but after a short time he retired to the forest with his 2 wives Kunti and Madri, to perform austerities and atone for a hunting accident, in which he had inadvertently killed Kindama Rishi while the Rishi was engaged in sexual activities with his own wife, within the privacy of a thick grove. During his stay in the forest, Pandu had 5 sons, that became known as the "five Pandavas". The birth of these boys was truly extraordinary.

Kindama Rishi had cursed Pandu with instant death as soon as he would begin sexual intercourse, so it was impossible for him to beget an heir to the kingdom.

In that circumstance, Kunti revealed that some years earlier she had received a special *mantra* from Durvasa Rishi, by which she could call a Deva and get a son from him. With Pandu's permission, Kunti evoked Yama (the Deva of death and justice), Vayu (the Deva of wind) and Indra (the Deva of lightning and rains, the king of the higher planets) giving birth respectively to Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna. Pandu's second wife (Madri)

borrowed the *mantra* from Kunti and used it to call the Asvini kumaras (the 2 Devas who are the heavenly physicians) who became the fathers of Nakula and Sahadeva.

However, Kunti chose not to reveal that before her marriage she had already used the *mantra* out of sheer curiosity, innocently evoking Surya (the Deva of the sun) and unexpectedly getting a son from him - Karna - whom she had immediately abandoned to the waters of the river. The baby had been found by Adhiratha, a charioteer belonging to the lowest rank of the *kshatriyas*, who together with his wife Radha had raised him modestly but with lots of affection as their own son.

When Pandu and Madri died, Kunti and the 5 boys returned to the capital, where the regent Dhritarastra yielded to the pressure of the *brahmanas* and the elders in the State assembly, and consecrated Yudhisthira as *yuvaraja*, the official heir to the throne. Besides being the eldest among all the brothers and cousins, Yudhisthira was also in the direct line of succession from his father Pandu, who had already been crowned the king.

Dhritarastra married princess Gandhari and begot his own children: 100 sons headed by Duryodhana, Duhsasana, Vikarna and Sukarna, and a daughter named Duhsala. Gandhari had been happy at the idea of becoming the queen of Hastinapura and was shocked when she learned that her future husband was blind, but because she was a real princess she decided to sacrifice herself for the good of the kingdom. To better understand and support her husband, Gandhari voluntarily renounced her eyesight and always wore a thick bandage over her own eyes - something that unfortunately must have created some emotional reactions both in her and in her brother Sakuni, who had accompanied her to her new home. This is shown by the fact that when she was informed about the birth of Kunti's first son, Gandhari - who was still pregnant - vented her uncontrollable anger against her own unborn child, hitting her own

belly and causing a miscarriage. Vyasadeva was called to save the situation: he collected the immature fetus and divided it into 100 clones, and put each one of them in a container to develop artificially till maturity.

Instigated especially by uncle Sakuni, Duryodhana grew up hating his cousins, and therefore organized many attempts at eliminating them. Unfortunately Dhritarastra and Gandhari allowed him to continue in his evil schemes because they hoped that their own temporary position at the top of the government could become permanent when Duryodhana would ascend to the throne.

Duryodhana's rage was directed particularly against Bhima, who was physically very strong and therefore regularly won all the fights and wrestling matches. The first assassination attempt was against him: during a picnic on the river Ganges Bhima was fed a poisoned cake, and when the boy lost consciousness, he was tied up with ropes and thrown into the water, so that the poisonous snakes living in that tract of the river would finish him off. However, the snakes' bites had the opposite effect, awakening Bhima from the slumber induced by the narcotic. So Bhima returned safely to the capital, while Duryodhana was torn between the rage for his own failure and the fear that Bhima would realize what had happened and take revenge.

In the subsequent years Duryodhana and his brothers were forced to live side by side with Pandu's sons, so they tried to distinguish themselves in some way from the cousins by taking the name of Kauravas ("descendents of Kuru", the great ancestor of Santanu) as opposed to the Pandavas ("sons of Pandu"), a definition that they considered demeaning in regard to hereditary rights.

The great Drona, a *brahmana* who was very expert in military sciences, settled at court to become the tutor of the princes, and his personal motivations created new seeds of tragedies. In fact Drona

was an excellent martial arts teacher, but contrarily to what is expected from a *brahmana*, he had an arrogant and revengeful nature that he chose not to correct. During his childhood days in the Gurukula he had become friends with another student, Drupada, the heir to the throne of Panchala. Later, after his marriage with Kripi and the birth of their son Asvatthama, Drona found himself in financial difficulties and went to see his old school mate Drupada and ask for his help. However, Drupada had recently become king and was still inebriated by his new position, so he treated him offensively. Furious, Drona swore to take revenge and decided to train one extraordinary student who would humiliate Drupada - and for this, he first needed to become the military Guru of the most powerful royal family of his times, the Kuru dynasty. After securing that position, Drona rejected all other students, an act that produced further negative reactions, as in the case of Karna.

Together with the 5 Pandavas, Karna is one of the main characters of the *Mahabharata*. As we have seen, he was actually their elder brother and as a direct manifestation of Surya, the Deva of the Sun, he was naturally a very powerful warrior, but as his family's position in society did not afford him to enjoy the advantages and opportunities of his true birth, he was unable to develop his real potential and he grew up torn apart by inner conflicts. Karna was keen to become a warrior and approached Drona for training, but he was rejected, so he went to see another exceptional teacher of martial arts: Parasurama the descendent of Brighu, who was still present on the planet after completing his mission of *avatara*. Knowing that Parasurama did not like *kshatriyas*, Karna introduced himself as a *brahmana* who was interested to teach the military arts, and he was accepted as a disciple. The cover up did not last long: Karna's actual qualities and behavior manifested beyond any doubt during his training, and Karna was kicked away and cursed, too.



One day Parasurama was sleeping, his head resting on his student's legs, and it so happened that an insect crawled on Karna's leg and started biting into it. Karna bravely tolerated the pain because he did not want to disturb his teacher's sleep, but the bite started bleeding and Parasurama woke up. When he saw what had happened, Parasurama realized that no *brahmana* would have been able to tolerate that pain with such determination, and knew that Karna was actually a *kshatriya*, more interested in fighting than in teaching. Offended by Karna's lie, that violated the fundamental dharmic principle of truthfulness, Parasurama cursed him to forget all the teachings he had received, and at the time when he would need them the most. This curse would take effect in the most crucial moment of Karna's life, when he finally faced Arjuna on the battlefield.

Arjuna was Drona's favorite pupil and became very expert in the science of weapons, including the Agneyastra and Varunastra, based on the control of the elements of fire and water. Pleased by his student's progress, Drona asked Arjuna to repay him for the teachings he had received, and as *guru dakshina* he ordered him to defeat king Drupada and bring him to his presence as a prisoner. Arjuna carried out the task, but showing the utmost respect and courtesy to Draupada, so much that the king wished to have Arjuna as his son in law. Brooding revenge against Drona, Drupada returned home and started a sacrifice ritual for the birth of Dhristadyumna and Draupadi - one destined to kill Drona and the other to marry Arjuna.

The *Jatugriha Parva* ("the book of the shellac house") continues by describing how Duryodhana, Sakuni and Duhsasana devised a new plan to assassinate their cousins. Sakuni hired the architect Purochana and sent him to Varanavata to build a royal residence for the summer holidays of the Pandavas, a house that was to be made with highly flammable materials.

Vidura came to know about the conspiracy and alerted the Pandavas, who dug a tunnel under the house and then took the initiative to torch the house before Duryodhana's agent had the time to do so. The tunnel surfaced at a certain distance on the Ganges bank, where a boatman at Vidura's service ferried the brothers and their mother Kunti to a safe place. So while at Hastinapura everyone believed they were dead, the Pandavas remained hidden in the forests.

The *Hidimba-vadha Parva* ("the book of Hidimba's killing") describes how, in the place known as Hidimbavana, the Pandavas were attacked by the *rakshasa* Hidimba, who was defeated and killed by Bhima. Hidimba's sister Hidimbi fell in love with Bhima and asked him for a son: thus was born brave Ghatotkacha, the half-blood *rakshasa* who will help his father and uncles in many adventures and fight on their side at Kurukshetra.

Finally the Pandavas arrived at the village of Ekachakra, where they stayed in the house of a local *brahmana* and saved his life by killing another *rakshasa*, Bakasura, who used to demand human sacrifices from the people who lived in that area. This episode is the central story of the *Baka-vadha Parva* ("the book of the killing of Baka).

In the next book, the *Chaitraratha Parva* ("the book of Citraratha"), Arjuna meets and duels Citraratha, the Gandharvas' king, defeating him. Besides, the Pandavas learned about the imminent *svayamvara* of princess Draupadi, the daughter of Drupada king of Panchala. After their *brahmana* host had narrated the miraculous circumstances of the birth of Draupadi and her brother Dhristadyumna, the Pandava journeyed to the capital of the Panchala kingdom.

In the book entitled *Svayamvara Parva* ("the wedding tournament") the Pandavas became the guests of a potter.

The tournament consisted in a classic archery test - with a huge steel horn bow, very difficult even to lift - and was accompanied by much celebration and entertainment, and great distributions of food and gifts especially to the *brahmanas*.

On that occasion Duryodhana officially promoted Karna to the position of *kshatriya* of royal rank, appointing him as the ruler of the kingdom of Anga (present Bengal) so that he could take part in the tournament, which was restricted to the royal princes. Disguised as a *brahmana*, Arjuna asked the king for the permission to attempt the test claiming that he was motivated by sheer curiosity, but he won the archery test by hitting the extremely difficult target: the eye of an artificial fish mounted on a wheel rotating on the ceiling, that could be aimed at only by looking at its reflection into an oil container on the floor.

The princes attending the event, including Duryodhana, Karna, Salya and Sakuni, protested because the princess was not supposed to marry a *brahmana*, but Arjuna and his brothers easily opposed and defeated all the warriors. Arriving back at the potter's house, Arjuna called his mother out, saying that he had won a great treasure, and even before asking what kind of treasure it was, Kunti told him he would have to share it with his brothers. Perplexed, Arjuna introduced his new bride to mother and after a consultation with Drupada, Vyasa and Dhristadhyumna, it was decided that Draupadi could be the wife of all the 5 brothers, as long as she lived with one of them at the time: this is the contents of the *Vaivahika Parva* ("the marriage").

The rumor of the extraordinary events at Draupadi's *svayamvara* traveled fast, and soon it was clear to everybody that the Pandavas were still alive. In the potter's house the Pandavas met their other cousins Krishna and Balarama, the sons of Vasudeva, Kunti's brother, who had rushed to congratulate them.

In the *Vidura gamana Parva* ("Vidura's journey") Dhritarastra sent a message to the Pandavas inviting them to return to the capital and promising to give them half the kingdom, but when the 5 brothers arrived at court, they were allotted a small unhabited area within the thick Khandava forest.

The section entitled *Arjuna vanavasa Parva* ("Arjuna goes to the forest") narrates how one day Arjuna was forced by the circumstances to enter the room where Yudhisthira was intimately staying with Draupadi, and according to the rules that the Pandavas had established for themselves, he left for a pilgrimage to atone for his violation. After visiting Prabhasa kshetra (also known as Somanatha) Arjuna went to Dvaraka and fell in love with Subhadra, the sister of Krishna and Balarama. In the section *Subhadra harana Parva* ("the abduction of Subhadra") Krishna helps Arjuna and Subhadra to elope together, because Balarama was against their marriage.

In the next section, entitled *Haranaharana Parva* ("the abduction that was not a real abduction") Krishna gave a speech in the assembly of the Yadus to pacify their anger for the abduction, and stated that women cannot be given in marriage against their own will. In the *Khandava-daha Parva* ("the burning of the Khandava forest") Krishna helped Arjuna to call Agni, who happily ate all the trees and plants of the forest, including a great quantity of medicinal herbs. The king of the heavenly planets Indra sent torrential rains to save his friend Takshaka (the king of snakes who lived in the forest) and was amazed to see that Arjuna repelled the rain with an equivalent shower of arrows. To pacify Arjuna, Indra offered him the Gandiva bow, a quiver of extraordinary arrows and a very special chariot. He also promised him some divine weapons, but he would deliver them only after Arjuna had secured the Pasupata astra from Shiva.

The *Sabha parva* ("the parliament") describes how Khandavaprastha became the prosperous Indraprastha and many residents of the old capital were happy to move into the new city of the Pandavas, thus leaving the corrupt tyrant Duryodhana. During the forest fire, Arjuna had also saved Maya Danava (the architect of the Daityas) and Maya Danava gratefully accepted to build for the Pandavas a splendid city and a wonderful royal palace, that included a special hall for the government assemblies.

In the section called *Sabhakriya Parva* ("the building of the assembly hall") we see Maya Danava engaged in the construction work, and gifting Arjuna with a war conch and Bhima with a special mace. The *Lokapala Sabhakhayana Parva* ("the government assembly for the protection of the people") describes the parliament of the Pandavas, that counted among its members also many Gandharvas residents of the higher planets. The great Rishi Narada, who is expert in all the branches of knowledge, went to visit the Pandavas in their new capital and after discussing with them about various topics on the management of the kingdom, reminded Yudhisthira that Pandu had planned to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice for the glory of their dynasty.

The section *Rajasuyarambha Parva* ("the beginning of the Rajasuya") shows the preparation for the great ceremony aimed at establishing the supremacy of the Pandava government. The main opponent to be defeated was Jarasandha, the evil king of Magadha, who had imprisoned a great number of *kshatriyas* to demonstrate his political supremacy. He had also subjugated many other kings such as Dantavakra, Karusha, Karava and Meghavahana, who had become his vassals.

Jarasandha, father in law of the Kamsa that had persecuted Krishna and all his family for a long time, had been raised by a Rakshasi named Jara and could not be killed in a fight. He had already attacked Mathura many times, so that in the end Krishna had to

move the entire population to the new city of Dvaraka to protect them from the constant aggressions. Disguised as *brahmanas*, the 5 Pandavas and Krishna went to Jarasandha's capital to challenge him to a fight, and thanks to Krishna's advice, Bhima found the way to kill Jarasandha. The kings were released from their imprisonment and happily pledged allegiance to Yudhishira: the Rajasuya yajna could then be performed right away. This is the contents of the *Jarasandha vada Parva*, "the killing of Jarasandha", followed by the *Rajasuyika Parva*, "the Rajasuya".

At the inauguration of the Rajasuya sacrifice, Sahadeva performed the *agra puja*, the offering of the "first honors" to Krishna, and on that occasion an old enemy of Krishna, his distant cousin Sisupala the king of Cedi, rose in the assembly to protest, repeatedly insulting Krishna and accusing him of having conspired to kill Jarasandha and Kamsa, kidnapped Rukmini and committed a series of other actions that he considered immoral. To keep the promise that he had made to Sisupala's mother, Krishna tolerated quietly for some time, but finally he silenced him by cutting his head off with the Sudarshana chakra, as we read in the *Sisupala vadha Parva*, "the killing of Sisupala".

The third main book of the *Mahabharata* is entitled ***Vana Parva*** ("the book of the forest") and also contains the sections called *Aranyaka* ("in the forest"), *Kirmira vadha* ("the killing of Kirmira"), *Arjuna abhigamana* ("Arjuna's departure"), *Kairata* ("the Kirata"), *Indraloka gamana* ("the journey to Indraloka"), *Nalopakhyana* ("the story of Nala"), *Tirtha-yatra* ("the pilgrimage"), *Markandeya samasya* ("the meeting with Markandeya"), *Draupadi Satyabhama samvada* ("the conversation between Draupadi and Satyabhama"), *Ghosha yatra* ("the inspection journey"), *Draupadi harana* ("the abduction of Draupadi"), *Pativrata mahatmya* ("the glory of the women who love their husbands") and *Aranya* ("the forest").

Duryodhana and the other Kurus had been invited to take part in the celebrations, and although they had been given tasks and responsibilities as they were members of the dynasty celebrating the sacrifice, they still had quite some free time. While he was enviously walking around to examine the palace, the Kuru prince mistook a very polished floor for a big water basin and lifted his *dhoti* to avoid getting wet, and soon afterwards made the opposite mistake, fumbling and falling into the water where he believed there was a solid floor. Humiliated by the general laughters and by the ironic comments of Draupadi, Duryodhana quickly returned to his palace, thinking of revenge.

Sakuni was a very expert gambler, and had some fixed dice that he could manipulate at will. Under the pretext of inaugurating a new hall in the palace, Duryodhana got permission from his father to organize a dice game against Yudhisthira, and with a series of insults and challenges he forced his cousin to gamble everything he had, including his own freedom and the freedom of his brothers and wife. Elated, Duryodhana sent for Draupadi to turn her into his maidservant, and when the minister Pratikami came back without Draupadi, he sent Duhsasana into Gandhari's apartments, where Draupadi had gone to plead for help: thus the queen of the Pandavas was dragged by her hair down to the assembly hall. Only one of the Kurus, Vikarna, stood up to defend Draupadi, saying that because Yudhishtira had already lost his own freedom before losing his wife's, he had no right to decide for her. Besides, Yudhisthira had not consulted his brothers, who also had a say in their own freedom and in Draupadi's. Furthermore, Sakuni had violated the rule by which each player must choose the stake freely. When Vidura and the other elders also supported Vikarna's speech and declared the game invalid, Karna stood up and said that in any case the Pandavas had lost everything they owned, including their expensive attire: Duryodhana was therefore entitled to collect their clothing. Duhsasana grabbed Draupadi's *sari* to

disrobe her, but miraculously the cloth kept expanding, so that the queen still had sufficient material to cover herself.

Puzzled by the extraordinary event and scared by Bhima's oaths of revenge, Dhritarastra pacified Draupadi and annuled the game, giving the Pandavas permission to return home to Indraprastha. Duryodhana protested and called his cousins back for another game: the stake was a 12 year exile in the forest, plus an additional year to be spent incognito. Playing a second time against the fixed dice, Yudhisthira was defeated and the 5 brothers left in exile with their wife, while Kunti remained at Hastinapura with Vidura.

Accompanied by Dhaumya and by a great number of subjects, the Pandavas reached Pramanakoti tirtha on the Ganges bank, where they asked the crowd to go back to their homes. Many, especially the *brahmanas*, decided to spend the night there anyway, and the next morning Yudhisthira was worried thinking of how he would be able to feed all his guests. On the advice of Dhaumya (the Pandavas' court priest) the king worshiped Surya and obtained an "inexhaustible pot" (*akshaya patra*), a copper casserole that once a day supplied unlimited quantities of food, stopping only when Draupadi herself had finished eating. After breakfast the Pandavas resumed their journey and reached Kamyavana.

In the meantime in the capital Dhritarastra was musing on the threats uttered by Bhima, who had said he would tear Duhsasana apart to drink his blood and remove his arms that had violently dragged Draupadi, and he would shatter Duryodhana's legs that had been shown to Draupadi with heavy sexual allusions.

The old regent sent for Vidura hoping for some comfort, but he got the exactly opposite effect, because his brother openly reprimanded him. Irritated, Dhritarastra told Vidura to go away and Vidura left the capital to go and stay with the Pandavas in the forest. Karna, too, tracked the Pandavas with the intention of



assassinating them, but he was dissuaded by Vyasa, who went to talk to him while he was going into the forest.

In the third day of their stay at Kamyavana, the Pandavas killed the Rakshasa Kirmira that had attacked them. Later on Krishna came to see them, accompanied by many Yadus. Draupadi vented her feelings, bursting into tears and telling Krishna about the offenses and the violence they had suffered: Krishna comforted her promising that Duryodhana and his allies would all be killed by the Pandavas, and that he would help them in all possible ways. "If I had been there, I would have prevented that shameful dice game," he told her, "but I was in Dvaraka fighting off Salva's attacks."

Subhadra and Abhimanyu left with Krishna to go and stay in Dvaraka, while the sons of Draupadi went with Dhristadyumna to Panchala, and then the Pandavas moved to Dvaitavana on the bank of the Sarasvati river to live in the company of the Rishis, such as Markandeya Rishi.

During that period Vyasa went to see them to discuss about the preparations for the war that would inevitably come; he told them that Duryodhana had already secured the military support of Bhurisrava, Asvatthama, Karna, Jayadratha, Bhishma and Drona, and reminded Arjuna that he still had to get weapons from Indra and the Pasupata astra from Shiva. Vyasa taught Arjuna the *pratismriti vidya*, that enabled him to evoke Indra, and while the other Pandavas returned to Kamyavana, Arjuna left for the Himalayas to propitiate Shiva.

When he arrived in that region, Arjuna was attacked by a wild boar and was going to shoot it with an arrow, when a hunter from a Kirata tribe (a mongolian ethnic group) stopped him, saying that he had been pursuing the animal first. Both arrows - the hunter's and Arjuna's - hit the boar simultaneously, and the two started to fight. Arjuna was amazed by the military skills of the hunter, and during

a pause in the fight he offered a flower garland to the image of Shiva he used to worship, to ask for divine help. Immediately the garland appeared on the hunter's neck and Arjuna realized the hunter was Shiva himself, who had come to test him. Shiva was pleased by Arjuna's humility and devotion, and gifted him with his Pasupata astra, also restoring Arjuna's other weapons that had been destroyed in the fight.

Since Indra's condition had been fulfilled, Arjuna went to Indra's capital Amaravati at Indraloka and remained there for 5 years, also learning the art of dancing from Citrasena, one of the Gandhava chiefs. One of the most beautiful and famous Apsaras, Urvasi, became attracted by Arjuna but he rejected her, treating her with the respect one shows to one's own mother; irritated and frustrated in her desire, Urvasi cursed Arjuna to lose his virility - a curse that Indra modified by reducing its effect to one year only.

As they had not heard from Arjuna for a long time, the Pandavas started to get worried, but Brihadhasva Rishi went to see them and reassured them, also telling the story of Nala and Damayanti, illustrating how patience and loyalty to *dharma* finally bring success in spite of the many difficulties that one may face in life.

Narada, too, went to see them and suggested they perform a pilgrimage. Another illustrious visitor, Lomasa Rishi, told them that he had recently seen Arjuna at Indraloka happily engaged to acquire new weapons. Accompanied by Lomasa and Dhaumya, the Pandavas left for a long journey, visiting Naimisharanya, Gaya (in present Bihar), Gangasagara (the Ganges delta in the bay of Bengal), the Vaitarani river and Prabhasa (Somanatha) and listening to the stories of the great personalities connected to those places. When they reached the Himalayas they met Ghatotkacha, who helped them climb the Gandhamadana hill to visit the *ashrama* of Nara and Narayana Rishi.

One day Draupadi found a *saugandhika* lotus flower and asked Bhima to bring her more; Bhima followed the intense scent of the flowers, but on his way he found a big ape who was resting stretched in the middle of the path. That monkey was actually Hanuman, also son of Vayu like Bhima: pleased by the kind and respectful behavior of Bhima, Hanuman blessed him and promised he would join the Pandavas to help them in the upcoming battle.

During their journey, the Pandavas met Markandeya Rishi again and heard from him the story of the Fish *avatara* and the victory of Subramanya on Mahisasura.

The inspection mentioned in the *Ghoshā yatra Parva* refers to another unsuccessful plan hatched by Duryodhana. With the purpose of humiliating the Pandavas, prince Duryodhana organized a grand display of his opulence for an official journey with the pretext of inspecting the king's cows that were grazing on the pastures at Dvaitavana, not far from the place where the Pandavas lived. In this exercise Duryodhana brought all his family and friends and engaged all the royal retinue, including bejeweled wives and servants carrying a lot of luggage. Unfortunately, the courtisans set up camp in a spot that had already been chosen by Citrasena, chief of the Gandharvas, who easily defeated Duryodhana's small army and captured both Duryodhana and Karna. Informed about the events, Yudhisthira sent Arjuna and Bhima to rescue their cousins and Citrasena, who had recognized Arjuna (his former dance student on Indraloka) was glad to deliver the prisoners to him. Doubly humiliated, Duryodhana had to tolerate Yudhisthira's reprimand, and he was scolded by Bhishma too when he returned to the capital.

In a fresh attempt at revenge, Duryodhana took advantage of the visit of the irritable Rishi Durvasa and sent him to "test" the Pandavas in the forest; Duryodhana reasoned that if Durvasa had arrived there after the miraculous pot had finished its daily work,

the Pandavas would have to suffer the wrath of the Rishi who could not be fed.

In that difficult situation Krishna arrived and to the greater perplexity of Draupadi, he asked for food himself. However, there was a higher purpose to that strange playful request: when Draupadi gave him the empty pot, Krishna scratched a bit of vegetables that was stuck to the bottom and immediately ate it. Precisely at that time, Durvasa and all his followers, who were bathing in the river before lunch, had a strange feeling almost as if they had just finished eating a huge meal. It had been created by Krishna's illusory power, but still they realized they would not be able to eat even a morsel of food, and decided to just leave quietly.

Another day, Draupadi was attacked by Jayadratha (king of Sindhu and husband of Duhsala, Duryodhana's sister), but the Pandavas immediately rescued her. The episode offered the opportunity for a new conversation between Yudhisthira and Markandeya Rishi to glorify women who were extraordinarily faithful to their husband - such as Sita the wife of Rama and Savitri the wife of Satyavan.

Another famous episode in this section is the meeting between Yudhisthira and Yamaraja. The Pandavas were approached by a *brahmana* who had lost his *aranis* (the wooden sticks used to light the fire), taken away by a deer. Pursuing the animal, the Pandavas arrived at a lake and decided to rest. The Yaksha who was the owner of that land demanded adequate answers to his questions before allowing them to take any water. As no one of his brothers had returned from the lake with the water, Yudhisthira himself finally went there and rescued his brothers by correctly answering the following questions:

- \* how can one become knowledgeable? (by studying the *shastra*)
- \* what is heavier (in the sense of "important") than earth? (mother)
- \* what is higher (in the sense of "noble") than sky? (father)

- \* what supports the sun? (truth)
- \* what knowledge does the *kshatriya* need to perform his duty? (the knowledge of weapons)
- \* what is more numerous than the blades of grass? (thoughts)
- \* what is faster than the wind? (the mind)
- \* what is the best type of wealth? (the knowledge of scriptures)
- \* what loss is not cause of sorrow? (the loss of anger)
- \* what defines a *brahmana*? (sattvic life)
- \* what is the most amazing thing? (people see everybody dies, yet they never really expect they will die, too)
- \* what are people looking for in life? (happiness)
- \* what is the highest value? (compassion)

Pleased, the Yaksha revealed his true identity as Yama and blessed Yudhisthira forecasting his victory in the war.

Indra, too, wanted to help his son Arjuna; he went to Karna and asked him in charity the armor (*kavacha*) and the ear-rings (*kundala*) that protected his life. Although he had been warned in a dream by his father Surya, Karna decided to comply with Indra's request and he asked for the Shakti weapon in exchange. Indra agreed, but warned him that it was just a loan, and he would be able to use that weapon once only.

The fourth main book, the *Virata Parva*, also has 4 minor books about the year of incognito exile spent by the Pandavas at the court of king Virata of Matsya desa. Arjuna wrapped all their weapons in a large bunch and hid them on a *sami* tree near a crematorium, shaping the bunch in such a way that it looked like a dead animal body. Then Yudhisthira took the identity of Kanka, a *brahmana* expert in the scriptures and passionate about dice games, Bhima became Ballava and was hired as chief cook. Arjuna put Urvasi's curse to a good use by becoming the transexual Brihannala and taught dancing to princess Uttara and her maidens in the women's

apartments. Under the name of Granthika, Nakula became superintendent to the horses' stables, and Sahadeva as Tantripala took care of the cows. Draupadi took the name of Sairandhri and became the lady in waiting for queen Sudesna. About 3 months later, Virata organized a wrestling tournament and Bhima earned everyone's admiration by answering the challenge of a visiting wrestler, Jumuta, and defeating him in the name of the king.

Trouble arrived when Kichaka, commander in chief of Virata's army and brother to the queen, became attracted by Draupadi's beauty and tried to take advantage of her with the complicity of the queen herself, who ordered her lady in waiting to go to Kichaka's room on the pretext of an errand. Draupadi appealed to Virata's assembly for protection, but without any result; from their part, the Pandavas could not risk being recognized. That night, Draupadi lured the general to a hall in the palace where Bhima, disguised in female attire, could kill him secretly. On the next day, Draupadi said that Kichaka had been killed by her Gandharva husbands. Terrified, the queen wanted to ban Draupadi from the kingdom, but Draupadi asked for 3 more days before leaving.

The news of those strange events reached Duryodhana's spies, and the Kuru prince organized a surprise attack against Virata aimed at forcing the Pandavas out in the open, which would send them into another long period of exile. Duryodhana' ally, Susharma of Trigarta, attacked Virata's herds from south-est and captured the king who had gone to defend the cows. Ballava immediately went to the rescue, so when Duryodhana attacked the capital from the north side, the only warrior left in the palace was young prince Uttarakumara. Brihannala volunteered to accompany him as a charioteer, and when the prince panicked on the battlefield, Brihannala revealed his identity as Arjuna, recovered his weapons from the *sami* tree and handing the reins to Uttarakumara, fought the aggressors back.

Duryodhana, however, had made a mistake in his calculations and he was distraught and frustrated to learn that the incognito year had just finished when the Pandavas had been tracked. The Kauravas were not in agreement about the strategy to be followed at that point; after a discussion where insults were exchanged, half of the army with the great generals - Karna, Drona, Kripacharya, Bhishma and Asvatthama - stayed to face Arjuna, while one fourth of the army went to guard the cows and the rest returned to the capital with Duryodhana. Arjuna did not stop to fight against the great generals, but rescued the cows and then pursued Duryodhana, challenging him to a fight. Arjuna shot the Sammohana weapon, by which all the warriors became unconscious, and with Uttarakumara's help he collected all their shawls as a trophy.

Because the Pandavas had not yet revealed their true identities to Virata, the king attributed the success of the military expedition to the young prince, and when Kanka praised Brihannala, the king threw the dice into his face in anger. Sairindhri rushed in to collect Kanka's blood before it hit the ground, saying that in that way she had saved the kingdom from a great disgrace. When he learned that the 5 strange personalities at his service were actually the Pandavas, and hearing the true story of the battle from Uttarakumara, Virata felt ashamed and tried to atone for his offensive behavior by offering them his own kingdom and the hand of his daughter. Yudhishthira accepted the alliance of the Matsya kingdom for the imminent war, and Arjuna suggested that his own son Abhimanyu would be a more suitable husband for the young Uttara, whom he had come to love as a daughter.

The *Udyoga Parva* ("the book of attempts") is about the efforts of the Kauravas and the Pandavas to get ready for the imminent war. Krishna attended the marriage between Uttara and Abhimanyu, and spoke to the various kings in attendance, officially requesting alliance pledges, while Balarama intervened to give a last chance

to Duryodhana, and the *purohit* (royal priest) of Drupada was sent as a messenger, too.

Krishna returned to Dvaraka and there in the same day he received the visit of both Duryodhana and Arjuna: on that occasion Duryodhana was the first to enter the room where Krishna was sleeping, and sat near the head of the bed, while Arjuna respectfully remained at the foot of the bed. Krishna woke up and seeing Arjuna, invited him to present his request, but Duryodhana protested, saying he had come first and therefore he had priority in presenting his request for alliance in the war. Krishna solved the problem by offering them to choose between his large army and his own personal presence; however he would just act as advisor and not as a warrior and he would abstain from fighting. Arjuna chose to have Krishna at his side as his charioteer, and Duryodhana was very happy to get the army. On the other hand, Balarama completely withdrew from the scene and left for a pilgrimage until the end of the war.

King Salya of Madra desa, brother of Madri (Pandus second wife) went to Upaplavya camp to offer his alliance to the Pandavas, but Duryodhana rushed to the spot and organized a grand welcome for Salya and his army, pretending to be in charge of the camp. Pleased, Salya offered a boon to the camp organizer and Duryodhana immediately asked for his alliance in the war. Aghast, Salya went to Yudhishthira to consult with him, and it was decided that Salya would take Duryodhana's side in the army but he would do his best to discourage Karna during the battle.

There were many other discussions: in the assembly of the Kauravas, Bhishma was favorable to returning the kingdom to the Pandavas, while Karna proposed that they should be sent into exile for another 12 years. Dhritarastra suggested that the Pandavas should be offered the choice between going into the forest and moving to Dvaraka with Krishna. Sanjaya and Vidura went



privately to Dhritarastra reminding him of his responsibilities, and since that was not enough, they asked the great *sannyasi* Sanat sujata to talk to him and convince him to change his ways, as we read in the *Sanat sujata Parva*.

In the meantime in the Pandava's camp, Krishna decided to personally go as a messenger to the Kurus' capital: the journey is described in the section entitled *Bhagavat Yana*, "the Lord's mission". After dining and spending the night in Vidura's house instead of attending the official banquet organized by Dhritarastra, Krishna went to the Kurus' assembly for a last attempt at reconciliation. Duryodhana declared that he would not give the Pandavas even the smallest piece of land and stormed out angrily.

Dhritarastra commented that it was impossible for him to intervene in any way to change Duryodhana's decision, and Krishna replied that sometimes to save a dynasty one has to sacrifice a member of the family. Krishna suggested that the war could still be avoided by delivering Duryodhana, Sakuni, Karna and Duhsasana as prisoners in the hands of Yudhisthira, and Duryodhana was informed by his spies. Furious, the prince went to consult with his supporters and started to organize Krishna's arrest. Laughing, Krishna showed his universal form to Dhritarastra, Drona, Bhishma, Vidura and Sanjaya before leaving the assembly, and declared that now the Kauravas were the only ones responsible for the consequences of their own choices.

Before returning to the Pandavas, Krishna went to Karna to reveal him the secret of his birth and convince him to join his brothers, but Karna could not betray his loyalty towards those who had always supported him. Vidura and Kunti too tried to convince Karna, supported by Surya's personal witness, but to no avail: all Karna could do was to promise to only kill Arjuna, so that Kunti would still be left with 5 sons.

The last envoy was the king of Uluka (from whose name the *Uluka Dutagamana Parva*, or "the book of Uluka's mission"), who had become a vassal of Yudhisthira during Arjuna's *dig-vijaya*. This king of Uluka, named Vrihanta, should not be confused with Uluka the son of Sakuni.

When all the attempts at reconciliation had failed, the armies assembled at Kurukshetra, a famous holy place about 160 km from the capital of the Indian nation (anciently known as Hastinapura). The ancient circle of 128 km includes a great number of temples and sacred lakes that were pilgrimage places even before Krishna's appearance, since the *avatara* Parasurama had gone there to bathe for purification after his military campaign against the *kshatriyas* that had revolted against Dharma. According to the *Matsya purana* this was the most sacred region in Dvapara yuga and one of the 16 *mahajanapadas* ("most important places") in Jambudvipa (planet Earth).

The precise place of the ancient battle is known as the place presently called Jyotisar, near Thanesar, Kurukshetra district, in the Indian State of Haryana, but the time of the battle is very controversial. Based on the planetary references quoted in the text of the *Mahabharata* itself, and particularly on the rare event of the 3 subsequent eclipses in one single month, various scholars have proposed different dates. According to S. Balakrishna the date is 2559 BCE, while according to I. N. Iyengar is 1478 BCE, according to B. N. Achar is 3067, according to P. V. Holey is precisely 13th November 3143, while according to P. V. Vartak it is 16th October 5561 and for K. Sadananda the 22 November 3067 - always before the Current Era.

Traditionally the hindu lunar calendar celebrates the "appearance" of *Bhagavad gita* on the day of Margasirsa sukla trayodasi, that may fall at the end of October, in November or even in early December, according to the coincidences with the solar calendar;

the differences of opinion on the precise year are due to the fact that the planetary positions described in the text have occurred several times in history. Conventional historians and archeologists tend to shift the Kurukshetra battle towards 1500 BCE, if not later. Unfortunately the dating of historical events in India is subject to the confusion created by the conventional western academia, that tends to reject the idea of an antiquity greater of that afforded by the conventional calculation on the development of the ancient civilizations and the passage from a "pre-history" where all human beings were uncivilized to a "history" where mankind started to develop culturally, and more precisely in regard to Indian history from the supposed dates of the so-called "aryan invasion".

Another ideological obstacle is the disbelief of conventional historians towards the lists of kings included in the vedic scriptures. They calculate that there were 18 dynasties over 26 generations (and thus about 1050 years) between the birth of Maharaja Parikshit or his grand-grandchild Adhisimakrishna and the crowning of Mahapadma Nanda, that historians set in 382 BCE. Of course this calculation is based on only 18 years for each reign, which is a very low estimate.

Vedic Tradition does not give much importance to precise historical dates, if not to connect the circumstances of a particular event with cyclic factors, as for example the beginning of Kali yuga or the occurrence of particular positions of the planets and the stars influencing the events on earth. More relevant factors are those referring to the political and military situation of the various kingdoms and dynasties of the times, that all participated to the battle with the only exception of Rukmi (the brother of Rukmini wife of Krishna) whose alliance was rejected by both sides.

In the Pandavas' army, besides the 5 brothers and their 5 sons from Draupadi, we also find Abhimanyu (the 16 year old son of Subhadra and Arjuna), Iravan (son of the Nagini Ulupi and Arjuna)

and Ghatotkacha (son of the Rakshasi Hidimbi and Bhima). There was the entire family of Draupadi - Drupada king of Panchala, Dhristadyumna the son of Drupada specifically born for that war, Sikhandi(ni) the adopted son of Drupada, and the other sons of Draupada named Dhristaketu, Yudhamanyu, Satyajit and Uttamauja. There was king Virata of Matsya desa with his sons Sveta, Uttara and Sankha, Kuntibhoja (Kunti's adoptive father) and his son Purujit, Dhristaketu son of Sisupala and king of Cedi, Sahadeva son of Jarasandha and king of Magadha, and Satyaki and Cekitana of the Yadavas.

On the Pandavas' side there was also the king of Kasi (Varanasi) who was a vassal of the kingdom of Koshala (Ayodhya), Sarangadhvaja the king of Pandya (with capital at Madurai, south of the present Tamil Nadu, from river Kaveri to Kanyakumari), the king of Telinga or Telangana (presently Tamil Nadu) and 5 princes of Kekaya, headed by the eldest Brihadkshatra, who had been exiled from their kingdom. There were also the generals of Parama Kamboja (present Tajikistan) who did not have a king; they belonged to the "external" territories or Bahlikas that did not follow the Vedic system (Kirata, Gandhara, Barbara, Yavana, Saka, etc).

The Pandavas' army had 7 *akshauhinis* or batallions for a total of 1,530,900 warriors, plus a non-specified number of non-organized troops coming from the barbarians' provinces. One *akshauhini* consists of 21,870 war chariots, 21,870 war elephants, 65,610 horses and 109,350 foot soldiers.

In the army of Duryodhana, that commanded 11 *akshauhinis* (2,405,708 warriors) there were also his 99 brothers with their sons. There was the old and extremely powerful warrior Bhishma, his uncle Bahlika (Santanu's brother), Somadatta son of Bahlika and Bhurisrava son of Somadatta. There were the *acharya* Drona and his son Asvatthama, and Kripacharya the brother of Drona's

wife. Sakuni (brother of Gandhari the mother of Duryodhana) was there with his son Uluka and several other relatives from the Gandhara kingdom, and there was also Sudakshina of Kamboja (brother of Duryodhana's wife). All Duryodhana's friends were there, beginning with Jayadratha the king of Panjab, Sindhu, Sauvira (Abhira) and Sibi (this is why he was also called Saibya), Bhagadatta the king of Pragjyotisha with his terrifying war elephants, Susharma of Trigarta with his brothers and their sons, Brihadbala and Vatsaraja of Kosala, king Nila of Mahishmati, the other Kekaya princes that were the rivals of Brihadkshatra, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti in Madhyadesa. King Salya of Madra, brother of Madri, had been forced to join the Kauravas, while Kritavarma and his son Matrikavat had been instructed by Krishna to fight in favor of Duryodhana leading Krishna's personal army, called Narayani sena and consisting of 1 million cowherd men coming from Mathura. Among the other supporters of Duryodhanas there were the Rakshasas called Alambusha and Alayudha, the tribal king of Kalinga, and several chieftains of the barbarians' territories, such as Kamboja, Yavana, Saka, Mahishaka, Tushara, Dravida, Usinara, Pulinda and Kolisarpa.

Karna king of Anga, his son Vrishasena and the other sons of Adiratha took part in the battle only after Bhishma's fall.

The rules of the *kshatriyas'* chivalry code would be gradually broken in the course of the war, thus marking the beginning of the sad period of the Kali yuga. According to the rules of the *dharma yuddha* ("battle according to the ethical principles") the fight cannot begin before sunrise or continue after sunset. Each warrior can only engage a warrior of equal strength, both in skills and in weaponry. It is not allowed to use force against a non-fighter (human or animal) or against anyone who has no weapons, has surrendered or lost consciousness, or is looking in a different direction.

The *Bhishma Parva* ("the book of Bhishma") is the first section of the epic's core that we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Before the start of the great battle, Vyasa went to meet Dhritarastra and offered him the blessing of becoming able to see what was happening at Kurukshetra; when Dhritarastra refused to accept it, saying that he did not want to risk seeing the death of his own sons, Vyasa gave this gift to Sanjaya. In this way Sanjaya was able to describe to Dhritarastra all the events of the war. The description starts with the list of the various armies coming from all regions of the earth and a study of their kingdoms in the sections entitled *Jambu-khanda Nirmana Parva* and *Bhumi Parva*, respectively regarding the region of Jambudvipa and Earth in general (called Bhumi).

After describing the two armies, Sanjaya watched Arjuna, who was distraught at the idea that the imminent battle would see all those people killing each others, although they were brothers, sons, friends, allies, teachers, relatives and parents. Besides, an enormous number of kings and warriors would die, thus depriving their kingdoms of the necessary protection in future. The battle could not be avoided and was meant to protect the kingdom from bad rulers, but the demise of so many men would throw their families and kingdoms in a situation of great difficulty and suffering, and for people it would become harder to live in an ethical way and progress at individual and collective levels. Faced with such a difficult dilemma, Arjuna wondered what was the purpose of life, the supreme principle that a human being should follow in his actions. Here is the context of the famous conversation between Krishna and Arjuna.

The text of *Bhagavad gita* ends showing Arjuna in a balanced state of mind, determined to perform his duty, but when Arjuna had become free from his doubts, it was Yudhisthira's turn to do something that amazed the warriors assembled for the battle.

Casting off his weapons and armor, he descended from his chariot and walked towards the Kurus' line to offer his homage to the elders of the family and his teachers, and ask their permission to engage in the battle. After receiving the blessings of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Salya, Yudhishthira returned to his chariot and the battle finally started.

The *vyuha* chosen by Dhristadhyumna (commander in chief of the Pandavas' army) was the one called *Vajra*, "lightning" or "diamond", as a response to the *Garuda vyuha*, "the eagle" of the Kauravas. In the *Vajra vyuha* the speed of attack is particularly important and therefore the first line utilizes short-range weapons, while the archers are in the second line. In the *Garuda vyuha* the kings march ahead, the horsemen protect the wings and the elephants constitute the external perimeter of the body. Bhishma was on his chariot in the middle of the battle formation, as if riding an eagle. Arjuna's son Abhimanyu, who was only 16 years old, penetrated the Kurus' formation and attacked Bhishma, while Salya was engaged against Virata's sons - Uttara and Sveta - who were finally killed also with Bhishma's help.

On the second day of the battle, the Pandavas arranged their forces in the *Krauncha vyuha* ("heron") with Draupada at the head and Yudhishthira at the tail. Like on the previous day, the Kauravas were facing west and the Pandavas east. The Kauravas, too, used the same formation, with Bhurishrava and Salya on the left wing and Somadatta and Kamboja on the right wing. Arjuna realized that the priority was to stop Bhishma and launched an attack, but Bhishma was well protected and the clash went on for many hours.

In the meantime Drona and Dhristadyumna were engaged in a similar duel; at some point Bhima rushed to help Dhristadyumna, whose bow had been broken. Duryodhana sent the army of the Kalinga king to attack Bhima, but almost all these soldiers were killed.

Satyaki was finally able to eliminate Bhishma's charioteer, and the uncontrolled horses dragged him away from the battlefield.

On the third day Bhishma again arrayed the *Garuda vyuha* but riding at its head, while the Pandavas' army was arranged in the *Chandrakala vyuha* ("moon sickle"), with Bhima and Arjuna respectively at the right and left points. The Kauravas focused their attack against Arjuna, who fought back by creating a fortification of arrows. Abhimanyu and Satyaki engaged Sakuni and his Gandhara army, while Bhima and his son Ghatotkacha attacked Duryodhana at the rear; when Duryodhana was hit and lost consciousness, his charioteer carried him away from the battle and his soldiers dispersed. When he awoke, Duryodhana rushed back into the fight, venting his anger against Bhishma and accusing him of not putting sufficient effort against the Pandavas. Smitten by the unjust remark, Bhishma renewed his attacks, while Arjuna was still reluctant to fight against him.

On the fourth day many of Duryodhana's brothers attacked Abhimanyu, and Arjuna and Bhima went to help him. Bhima jumped to the ground and held his mace up to face a horde of war elephants, and in the battle he killed 8 of Duryodhana's brothers, but was hit in the chest by an arrow. Ghatotkacha rushed to his rescue and defeated Bhagadatta. At the end of the day Duryodhana again complained with Bhishma, but Bhishma replied that the Pandavas could not be defeated because they were loyal to *dharma*.

On the fifth day the Kauravas took the *Makara vyuha* ("crocodile formation") and the Pandavas the *Syena vyuha* ("hawk formation"). Satyaki and his 10 sons were attacked by Bhurisrava; only Satyaki survived, rescued by Bhima. Bhishma arrived to engage Bhima, but he withdrew when Sikhandi arrived. There was also a clash between Arjuna and Asvatthama.



On the sixth day the Pandavas took the *Makara vyuha* and the Kauravas the *Krauncha vyuha*, headed by Dhristadyumna and Drona respectively. Duryodhana was seriously wounded in a clash with Bhima and in the night he had to be medicated by Bhishma. On the seventh day the *Mandala vyuha* ("orbit") of the Kauravas was opposed to the Pandavas' *Vajra vyuha*. Drishtadyumna defeated Duryodhana, Yudhisthira defeated Srutayu and Sahadeva defeated Salya, while Drona prevailed on Virata, Bhurisrava on Dhristaketu, and Bhagadatta on Ghatotkacha. Bhagadatta, the king of Pragjyotisha (present Assam), was famous for his army of elephants headed by a gigantic pachiderm named Supratika.

On the eighth day the Kauravas used the *Urmi vyuha* ("ocean waves formation") and the Pandavas the *Sringata vyuha* ("horns formation"). Bhima killed 8 more of Duryodhana's brothers, while Alambusha killed Iravan, the son of Arjuna and the Nagini Ulupi, who had killed 6 sons of Sakuni and defeated Sakuni himself.

As soon as he heard about Iravan's death, Ghatotkacha started slaughtering the Kaurava army and engaged in a fight with Bhagadatta who had come to face him. Helped by Bhima and Arjuna, Ghatotkacha fought back the enemies. That night Duryodhana complained again and told Bhishma he had to make some more efforts.

On the ninth day the Kauravas arranged the *Sarvatobhadra vyuha* ("good on all sides") to protect Bhishma. Abhimanyu defeated Alambusha but was attacked by Bhishma. Arjuna fought against Drona: to his Vayuvastra ("wind weapon") Drona opposed the Sailastra ("stone weapon"). Krishna encouraged Arjuna to kill Bhishma, but without much success; at some point Krishna became angry and personally rushed against Bhishma, armed with a chariot wheel, but he was stopped by Arjuna who reminded him his promise of not engaging in the battle.

Then Krishna suggested that they should go and ask Bhishma himself how the Pandavas would be able to defeat him: Bhishma simply replied that he would not fight against a woman. Thus on the tenth day of the battle, the Pandavas put Sikhandi/Sikhandini at the head of their formation, and behind him (her) Arjuna started to shoot arrows at Bhishma. Finally the great warrior fell, his body pierced by so many arrows that it did not even touch the ground.

The fight halted and both Kauravas and Pandavas gathered around Bhishma to offer their homage to the great fallen hero. Bhishma asked Arjuna for some water and a head rest, and Arjuna complied by shooting some arrows into the ground and evoking Mother Ganges. Bhishma had the power to choose the moment of his own death and had promised Santanu that he would not die without ensuring the protection of Hastinapura, therefore he remained in that position until the end of the war, while the fight moved to another area to avoid disturbing him. That night, when everybody returned to their tents, Karna went to see Bhishma to apologize for his past enmity and offer his homage, and Bhishma reminded him that he was son of Kunti. Tormented at that thought, Karna begged Bhishma not to reveal that secret to anyone, and Bhishma promised he would only tell Duryodhana, to make him realize the extent of Karna's affection and loyalty.

The *Drona Parva* begins the evening of the tenth day of the war, with the consecration of Drona as commander in chief of the Kaurava army (*Dronabhisheka*) on Karna's request.

On the eleventh day the Kauravas were arranged in the *Sakata vyuha* ("cart formation") and the Pandavas in the *Krauncha vyuha* ("heron formation") with Karna and Arjuna respectively at the head of the two armies. Drona organized a plan to capture Yudhisthira as a hostage, but the attempt failed thanks to Arjuna's intervention. That night Drona and Duryodhana spoke in the assembly on how to neutralize Arjuna, and Susharma the king of

Trigarta swore in front of the fire that he was determined to kill Arjuna even at the cost of his own life. Susharma was tied by a blood pact(*samsaptaka*) to his 3 brothers and 35 sons, and all of them engaged in battle against Arjuna, while Drona tried to capture Yudhishthira. Karna engaged in a fight against Virata, Bhima defeated Salya in a mace duel, Vrishasena (the son of Karna) fought against Satanika (the son of Nakula) and Abhimanyu had several duels, too.

On the 12th day the Samsaptakas (Susharma and his family) rode at the head of the *Chandrakala vyuha* ("half moon formation") to attack Arjuna, and Arjuna engaged them in battle, entrusting Satyajit (Drupada's brother) with the protection of Yudhishthira. While Arjuna launched his Vayuvastra, Drona attacked Yudhishthira, defeating the army of Drupada and killing Satyajit, Satanika, Kshema, Dridhasena and Vasudana. Yudhishthira barely escaped while Bhima, Abhimanyu and Satyaki were busy fighting off the attack of Bhagadatta and his elephants.

The 3 Pandava warriors lost their chariots but survived the attack; Bhima sneaked under the elephant Supratika, that started wheeling around trying to catch him. Fearing that Bhima had been killed, Yudhishthira launched Drupada's army to the rescue, but Bhagadatta killed Dasarna and Ruciparva. Yudhishthira too intervened but without success and finally Arjuna arrived and knocked off Bhagadatta's weapons; Bhagadatta evoked the Vaishnavastra against Arjuna, but Krishna stood up and absorbed the missile into his own chest.

Finally Arjuna killed Bhagadatta and his elephant, then he turned to face Sakuni's brothers Vrishala and Achala, downing them both with a single arrow. Sakuni rushed on, but he was defeated by Arjuna. Finally there was a duel between Arjuna and Karna - Karna shot the Agneyastra ("fire weapon") and Arjuna replied with the Varunastra ("water weapon").

On the 13th day the Samsaptakas engaged Arjuna in the north corner of the battlefield, while Drona advanced against Yudhisthira. The other Pandavas were busy trying to break Drona's *Chakra vyuha* ("disc formation"), but that secret was only known to very few people: Krishna and his son Pradyumna, and Arjuna and his son Abhimanyu - who only knew how to get inside, but not how to get out.

In the section entitled *Abhimanyu-vadha Parva* ("the killing of Abhimanyu") Yudhisthira asked Arjuna's son to help them, promising they would all immediately follow him. Abhimanyu broke into the middle of the enemy formation, fighting valiantly and killing the son of Asmaka and the brother of Salya, and sending Salya himself unconscious. The Pandavas tried to follow him but their path was obstructed by Jayadratha, who closed the formation again. Abhimanyu was then surrounded: Karna hit him from the back breaking his bow, Kritavarma killed his horses, Kripacharya killed the two charioteers, and Drona destroyed his sword. When Abhimanyu remained disarmed and defenseless, he was simultaneously attacked by all the great generals - Drona, Kripa, Karna, Asvatthama, Kritvarma and Brihadbala - plus a great number of other warriors. Abhimanyu fought very bravely: he killed Brihadbala (king of Koshala), Asvaketu (son of the king of Magadha) and Lakshmana the son of Duryodhana. He fought off the attack from Duhsasana, broke Karna's bow, killed Vatsatiya, Satyasrava, Rukmaratha and Vrindaraka, but in the end he had to succumb to the number of his assailants. Finally the son of Duhsasana smashed his head with the mace, finishing him off. One of Duryodhana's brothers, Yuyutsu, was so disgusted by this behavior shown by the Kauravas that he abandoned the war.

Arjuna returned to the camp after defeating the Samsaptakas; when he was informed about Abhimanyu's death, he was overwhelmed by the pain and swore that he would kill Jayadratha before the

sunset of the next day - failing which, he would commit suicide. Duryodhana's spies informed the Kauravas, who set Jayadratha's protection as their top priority.

On the 14th day the Kauravas created a combined formation composed by the *Sakata vyuha* ("the cart") in front, the *Padma vyuha* ("the lotus") in the back, and the *Suci mukha* ("the needle") in the middle of the *Padma vyuha* to protect Jayadratha. Arjuna easily penetrated the *Sakata vyuha* defended by Durmarshana (one of Duryodhana's brothers) and defeated Duhsasana and his elephants. Krishna advised Arjuna not to stop to fight against Drona but to find Jayadratha first. Kritavarma, Sudakshina and Srutayuddha faced Arjuna to stop him and Drona joined them, but Arjuna shot a Brahmastra and wiped them away. Srutayuddha threw his mace against Krishna but the weapon bounced back and killed him instead. Arjuna penetrated more deeply into the enemy formation, and killed Srutayu and Acyutayu.

Duryodhana procured a *mantra* armor from Drona and stood in front of Jayadratha to protect him, but Arjuna launched the Manavastra ("the mind weapon"). To defend Jayadratha then came 8 *maharathis* ("great chariots", meaning generals that could each engage 1000 warriors simultaneously), supported by many military divisions. On that day Arjuna and Satyaki alone killed 7 *akshauhinis* of the Kaurava army in order to accomplish their mission.

In the meantime Drona was still trying to take Yudhisthira prisoner, and the fight became furious on both sides. Ghatotkacha killed Alambusha, Drona killed Brihatkshatra, Dristaketu (the son of Sisupala), Sahadeva (the son of Jarasandha) and Kshatradharma (the son of Dhristadyumna). Yudhisthira was worried about Arjuna and sent first Satyaki and then Bhima to help. Satyaki faced Kritavarma, Drona, Duryodhana and his brothers including Duhsasana, but although he defeated Duhsasana, he did not kill

him because he wanted to leave him for Bhima. Karna tried to stop Bhima, helped by Duryodhana's brothers, but Bhima killed 32 of them; in the end Karna defeated Bhima, but honoring the promise he made to Kunti he did not kill him.

Satyaki kept advancing and had almost reached Arjuna, but he was stopped by Bhurisrava: he fell and was about to be beheaded, when Krishna told Arjuna to intervene to stop that action, that was against the rules. Arjuna shot an arrow, cutting off Bhurisrava's hand: Bhurisrava complained about the unannounced attack, but Arjuna reminded him how Abhimanyu had been killed and Bhurisrava, recognizing his fault, stopped fighting and sat in meditation. Satyaki rushed against him and beheaded him before anyone could stop him, then he attacked Karna to distract him from protecting Jayadratha.

The sun was going to set and Jayadratha was still protected by a great number of warriors, therefore Krishna launched his Sudarshana disc to cover the sun: darkness fell and Jayadratha, thinking that night had come, finally felt safe. Then on Krishna's order, Arjuna shot the Pasupata astra he had received from Shiva: Jayadratha's head was cut off and flew away. Following Krishna's instructions, Arjuna shot a series of arrows that bounced Jayadratha's head far away and off the ground, to the place where Vriddhakshatra, Jayadratha's father, was sitting in meditation for the evening rituals in the Kauravas' encampment. Thus the head fell on to Vriddhakshatra's lap, and when he stood up it rolled to the ground: the curse aimed at anyone who would make Jayadratha's head fall to the ground rebounded on the same person who had pronounced it, and it was Vriddhakshatra's head to burst into one thousand pieces.

Krishna recalled the Sudarshana and the sun shone again before setting, and Arjuna recalled the Pasupata astra. Duryodhana panicked and Drona agreed to continue the battle in spite of the

night fall. Bhima killed Bahlika and 12 more of Duryodhana's brothers, and Satyaki killed Somadatta.

Karna launched a powerful attack but Krishna prevented Arjuna from facing him, sending Ghatotkacha to fight him back: the young Rakshasa killed the horses of Karna's chariot and the Rakshasa Halayudha who protected him. Karna realized he was in serious danger and was forced to use the Shakti weapon he had received from Indra and was keeping aside with the purpose of killing Arjuna.

On his part, Ghatotkacha realized he would not be able to repel the Shakti. He accepted his imminent death, but he wanted to do as much damage as possible to the Kauravas with his own demise, so he expanded his body to such a size that when he fell, he crushed and killed over 400 thousand warriors. The death of brave Ghatotkacha gave great pain to the Pandavas and gladdened Duryodhana, who finally allowed the fight to stop. The warriors lay down to rest on the battlefield without returning to the camp, and Duryodhana took the opportunity to go and accuse Drona of favoring the Pandavas - the same accusation he had repeatedly thrown at Bhishma.

At that time Drona realized how his life and his choices had been dictacted by the wrong motivations, and became disgusted with himself. Here end the two sections entitled *Jayadratha vadha* and *Ghatotkacha vadha*.

The next section, entitled *Drona vadha* ("the killing of Drona") is the most important among the books dealing with the war. Almost all the warriors on both sides are killed here. Duryodhana divided the Kaurava army in two parts, personally leading one and leaving Drona in charge of the other. On the 15th day of the battle Duryodhana and Satyaki, who used to be good friends, faced each other in a duel, both weeping on their shattered relationship.

Satyaki defeated Duryodhana but left the camp and did not fight against him any more.

Drona raged on, killing Virata, Drupada and his 3 grandsons, reawakening the desire for revenge in Dhristadyumna, who had taken birth specifically to kill Drona. But how to defeat the great warrior?

Krishna suggested to weaken Drona's determination by leading him to believe that his son Asvatthama was dead. The Pandavas were hesitating to tell a lie but Krishna insisted, asking Bhima to kill a war elephant that was named Asvatthama, and to announce his death loudly. The Sapta Rishis ("seven Rishi") appeared on the battlefield and asked Drona to withdraw from the battle, because his behavior was not befitting a *brahmana*, but Drona did not listen to them. He rather approached Yudhisthira to ask him confirmation about Asvatthama's death, because he knew that Yudhisthira had never violated the principle of truthfulness. On Krishna's order, Yudhisthira repeated loudly, "Asvatthama is dead", and then murmured, *naro va kunjaro va*, "whether he was a human being or an elephant". Seeing that Drona was distraught, Dhristadyumna took the opportunity to attack him; Drona defended himself with the Vaitasmika astra, a weapon that is used at close range, but Dhristadyumna was protected by Satyaki. Then Bhima turned against Drona, reminding him of his bad choices and telling him that his son's death had destroyed all his reasons to continue living. Drona recognized the truth of that statement and taking leave from Duryodhana, Karna and Kripa, dropped his weapons and sat down to prepare for death. Finally Dhristadyumna beheaded him with his sword and Drona died. Arjuna felt deep sorrow for that death.

When he heard about the circumstances of his father's death, Asvatthama launched the Narayanastra, a mystic weapon that creates thousands of arrows with a burning tip, and fiery metal discs. Krishna told Yudhisthira that all the warriors needed to offer



their homage to that weapon by lowering their own weapons; only Bhima did not comply, saying that since the Narayanastra had been contaminated by Asvatthama it did not deserve to be respected. However, he was saved by Krishna and Arjuna. Then Arjuna challenged Asvatthama to a duel - Asvatthama launched the Agneyastra and Arjuna fought him back using the Brahmastra. At that time Vyasa appeared on the battlefield to inform Asvatthama he would never be able to kill Arjuna and Krishna, who are directly Nara and Narayana.

The next book, entitled *Karna Parva*, is not accompanied by other sections. After Drona's death, Karna became the commander in chief of whatever was left of the Kaurava army; on the 16th day the battle became a confused fight among the survivors, and there was no military strategy or arrangements any more.

Karna defeated Nakula but he let him go unscathed, to the great surprise of Duryodhana, who abstained from reproaching him anyway. Tormented by his own inner conflicts, Karna went to Duryodhana in the middle of the night and asked him to give him an exceptional charioteer, so that he would be able to kill Arjuna. When Duryodhana assigned him king Salya, Salya was outraged, but as a clever politician Duryodhana was able to pacify him with prayers and glorifications, and with the idea that he wanted to give Karna a charioteer that was even more powerful than Krishna. Salya agreed to take that position, on the condition that Karna strictly avoided any stupid behavior, recriminations, boasting, or blaming.

Thus in the 17th day Karna dueled with Arjuna, while Salya - loyal to the promise to Yudhisthira - kept sabotaging and hurting his feelings, so much that finally Karna begged him to stop talking. In the presence of Karna, Bhima attacked Duhsasana and smashed his chariot with the mace, then he grabbed him tearing his right arm from the shoulder, ripped his chest open and put his mouth to the

blood that gushed forth. Collecting some of that blood, he carried it to Draupadi according to the promise he had made her when she had been humiliated in the Kuru assembly: that she would have Duhsasana's blood to wash her untied hair to purify it.

Bhima then returned to busy himself with the warriors that were still around Karna to protect him - 10 of Duryodhana's brothers and Vrishasena the son of Karna, and killed them all.

When challenged by Yudhisthira and Sahadeva, Karna defeated them but let them go, to keep the promise to Kunti. Bhima, too, attacked Karna hitting him with such a powerful arrow that Karna lost his consciousness, but refrained from further revenge because Salya told him that Karna's destiny was in Arjuna's hands. So Bhima turned against 6 more of Duryodhana's brothers that had arrived on the scene, and killed them. Again Yudhisthira came forward to face Karna and again he had to retire, wounded and bleeding, and went to lie down at the camp, his entire body in pain.

Worried by Yudhisthira's absence, Arjuna and Krishna went to look for him, and Yudhisthira greeted them happily, thinking they had come to announce Karna's death. When he learned that Arjuna had not killed him yet, Yudhisthira became so angry that he was going to attack Arjuna himself, but he was stopped by Krishna. Shocked at the pain and despair shown by Yudhisthira, Arjuna swore that he would immediately kill Karna. A terrifying fight ensued, with extremely powerful mystic weapons. Arjuna launched the Agneyastra and Karna neutralized it with the Varunastra. To dissipate the vapors produced by the clash of the two weapons, Arjuna launched the Vayuvashtra, then he shot his Aindrastra showering the enemy with arrows.

Then Karna launched the Bhargavastra he had received from Parasurama, causing even greater destruction. Encouraged by Bhima and Krishna, Arjuna launched the nuclear weapon called

Brahmastra, but it was neutralized by Karna. Karna broke Arjuna's bow 11 times, and each time Arjuna replaced it at incredible speed. When Karna aimed at Arjuna's neck to launch the Nagastra, Salya distracted him saying that he should have aimed for the chest and the shot missed, also because Krishna had the horses kneel down, sinking the chariot several inches into the ground.

Suddenly, when Karna was getting ready to launch the Brahmastra, the left wheel of his chariot got stuck in the mud: Karna lost his concentration and became confused, just as Parasurama had predicted. Depressed, Karna descended the chariot to fix the wheel and asked Arjuna for a truce, appealing to the rule by which a disarmed enemy cannot be attacked. Krishna reminded him that no relief was granted to young Abhimanyu in even worse circumstances, and enumerated the long list of adharmic actions that Karna had committed to support Duryodhana. Karna bent his head in shame and resumed the fighting, trying at the same time to get the chariot out of the mud. Throwing the Anjalika, Arjuna was able to cut off Karna's head with an arrow, and at the death of the great warrior all fighting stopped to honor him.

That night Duryodhana, tormented by the death of his most loyal friend, went to Bhishma asking for comfort, and thus he came to know the secret of Karna's birth. Overwhelmed, Duryodhana chose to die in battle as soon as possible to be reunited with his beloved Karna.

The *Salya Parva* describes the last day of the battle, when the command of the army was given to Salya. On this day Nakula killed 3 more of the sons of Karna - Citrasena, Sushena and Satyasena, while Yudhisthira killed Drumasena and Chandrasena, and finally Salya himself, using his Shakti weapon dedicated to Kartikeya. Satyaki killed Salva and Duryodhana killed Cekitana. Sahadeva fulfilled his promise to kill Sakuni and his son, and Bhima killed the last of Duryodhana's brothers. Also all 29 of

Duryodhana's sons had died, and he realized that the war was finally lost. Of the 11 *akshauhinis* he had at the beginning of the war, only 4 warriors were left: himself, Asvatthama, Kripa and Kritavarma.

Filled with despair, Duryodhana fled to take shelter into a lake, and on his way he gave Sanjaya a last message for Dhritarastra and Gandhari, begging forgiveness for his bad actions and offering his respects. When his three generals came to look for him, he replied he was very tired and he needed resting. Yudhisthira was informed of the situation and went to the lake, but Duryodhana told him he had no more interest for the kingdom after his family's death, and he was giving it to him gladly. Yudhisthira derided him.

Balarama, who had just returned from his pilgrimage, arrived on the battlefield and under his supervision there was a mace duel between Duryodhana and Bhima - as he had sworn, Bhima broke Duryodhana's legs and crushed his groin as well (which was against the rules), leaving him to bleed to death. Duryodhana turned against Krishna, accusing him to have killed Drona and Karna in a manner that was against the rules, and Krishna replied accordingly. Saddened, Balarama returned to Dvaraka.

Duryodhana's fall marked the end of the war: Krishna blew his conchshell, announcing that the fighting was over. Then Krishna asked Arjuna to get out of the chariot with his weapons, and finally he descended the chariot himself: to the great amazement of everyone, Hanuman's effigy disappeared from the flag and the chariot was consumed by flames. Krishna explained that the many divine weapons that had hit the chariot had been kept at bay by his presence, but now the war was over, and the chariot could be destroyed.

That night Asvatthama, Kripacharya and Kritavarma went to Duryodhana to ask for instructions. The dying prince appointed

Asvatthama as chief commander of the army and Asvatthama swore to avenge him and his own father as well. The three generals sneaked into the Pandavas' camp while everybody there was asleep, and cut the throats of the five sons of Draupadi (believing them to be the 5 Pandavas), then they also killed Dhristadyumna, Shikhandi, Udhmanyu and Uttamauja before they could wake up, as described in the section called *Sauptika Parva* ("the sleepers").

The next morning, of the two immense armies only 12 warriors were still alive: the five Pandavas, Krishna, Satyaki and Kritavarma, Asvatthama, Kripacharya, Vrishakethu (son of Karna) and Yuyutsu (a brother of Duryodhana who had retired from the war at an earlier stage). Bhima, Arjuna and Krishna were informed about the slaughter by Dhristadyumna's charioteer and pursued Asvatthama, who launched the weapon Brahma sira, and Arjuna responded with the same type of weapon.

Vyasa and Narada personally intervened to withhold the two weapons, that would have caused a disaster of planetary level if they clashed. Then they asked the two fighters to withdraw the weapons, but Asvatthama could not do so, and was only able to direct it against the last descendant of the Pandavas, Parikshit, who was still in the womb of his mother Uttara. Krishna intervened saving the unborn child, and Asvatthama was exiled from the kingdom.

The *Stri Parva* ("the book of women") and the 2 added sections called *Jalapradanika* and *Stri-vilapa* describe how Gandhari, Kunti and the other women (*stri*) of the two clans arrived on the battlefield to mourn the fallen warriors. Vyasa and Vidura went to Dhritarastra to comfort him, and the old regent left the palace to go to the battlefield. The Pandavas approached him to offer their respects, but when Dhritarastra said he wanted to embrace his son's killer to show his forgiveness, Krishna quickly pushed Bhima aside, replacing him with a life-size iron statue that Duryodhana

had used for his fighting training. The statue was shattered in Dhritarastra's fierce grasp.

Gandhari had lost all her children and blamed Krishna for the Pandava's victory, so she cursed him to lose his entire family, too. This curse came to pass many years later, when in Dvaraka the young Yadu princes provoked the *brahmanas'* anger with a foolish disrespectful prank.

While the Pandavas were performing the funeral rites for the warriors who had died in the battle, Kunti told Yudhisthira he had to offer oblations for Karna's too, and revealed the secret of his birth. Shocked and saddened, Yudhisthira became angry with his mother, who by keeping silent had committed a terrible injustice and especially had caused a huge damage to the kingdom. So strong were his anger and his pain, that Yudhisthira retired to the bank of the Ganges refusing to return to the capital, and only one month later he could be convinced by Vyasa and Narada for the good of the kingdom and its subjects.

After appointing Bhima as *yuvaraja* ("junior king", the prince designed to become king in case of emergency), Arjuna as chief commander of the army and ambassador, Vidura as home minister, Nakula and Sahadeva as directors of security and provisions and Sanjaya as treasurer, Yudhisthira finally ascended the throne.

The time had come for Bhishma to leave his body, and the Pandavas went to the battlefield to offer their homage, while he was still lying on the arrow bed.

In the *Santi Parva* ("the book of peace") and *Anusasana Parva* ("the book of the last instructions) Bhishma dissolved Yudhisthira's guilty feelings, then on Krishna's request he gave the Pandavas many teachings in the various fields of knowledge and especially on Dharma, on the duties of the king (*raja dharma*), on

the extraordinary and temporary measures to be taken in cases of emergency and danger (*apaddharma*), on the ultimate purpose of life and on liberation (*moksha dharma*), as well as on the *varnas* and *ashramas*, on food restrictions, charity, non-violence and truthfulness.

After speeches by Brihaspati and Narada, Krishna narrated the glories of Shiva and recited the *Shiva sahasra nama* ("the 1000 names of Shiva"). In turn, Bhishma recited the *Vishnu sahasra nama* ("the 1000 names of Vishnu") offering homage to Krishna. At last Bhishma expressed his wish to finally leave his body, and after offering his worship to Krishna and contemplating his universal form, he died. The Pandavas performed his funeral rituals and then returned to the capital. These two books constitute the most voluminous part of the *Mahabharata*.

Arjuna adopted his nephew Vrishaketu and took him along in the campaign preceding the Asvamedha yajna performed by Yudhishthira to bring back order and peace in the kingdom at his coronation - as we see in the *Asvamedha Parva*, that also contains the *Anugita* ("the repeated song"), that is a repetition of the teachings of *Bhagavad gita* by Krishna. Before leaving for Dvaraka, Krishna attended the ceremonies for the birth of baby Parikshit.

The *Ashramavasa Parva* ("the book of living in the *ashrama*") begins 15 years later. Vidura felt that his life was going to end and he went to see Kunti, Gandhari and Dhritarastra, who had been living in the palace, honored by the Pandavas, and convinced them to leave the capital to retire to Satayupa in the region of Kurukshetra and build a small *ashrama* to perform austerities until the end of their days. The last instruction that Dhritarastra gave to his loyal assistant Sanjaya was to settle in a sacred place on the Himalayas.

This book is accompanied by the sections *Putradarsana* ("the apparition of the son") and *Naradagamana* ("Narada's visit") in which Duryodhana's ghost appeared to his parents and Narada Rishi offered teachings about detachment from the material world.

In the brief *Mausala Parva* ("the book of maces") we read that Krishna and the Yadavas went to Prabhasa kshetra (Somanatha) in a pilgrimage to offer the yearly worship to Shiva, and that in the ensuing celebrations they consumed rice wine. In his drunkenness, Satyaki started a fight with Kritavarma as he remembered the killing of Draupadi's children, and Kritavarma responded by mentioning Bhurisrava. Satyaki jumped on Kritavarma and cut his head off - in the furious fight that ensued, almost all the Yadus killed one another using the large bamboo canes that had grown on the beach due to a curse. Krishna and Balarama did not take part in the fight, but Balarama sat in meditation and left his body, while Krishna was shot in the foot by a hunter who thought he had spotted a deer. Before dying, Krishna sent Daruka to Arjuna with a message warning him about the imminent destruction of Dvaraka, that would be covered by the ocean waters, and asked him to move the survivors to the Kuru capital.

Yudhisthira had reigned for 36 years when he heard the news of Krishna's disappearance and the destruction of the Yadu dynasty. He left the kingdom to his grandson Parikshit and crowned Vajra, Krishna's grandson, as king of Indraprastha, where all the surviving Yadus were settled. Yuyutsu was put in charge of administrative responsibilities and Subhadra remained with her grandson Parikshit.

Together with his brothers and Draupadi, Yudhisthira left for his last pilgrimage to the Himalaya, described in the *Mahaprasthanika Parva* ("the book of the great journey"). One by one the Pandavas fell on the way and finally Indra descended with his chariot to take Yudhisthira to the heavenly planets in his very mortal body due to



his loyalty to Dharma, as it is written in the *Svargarohanika Parva* ("the attainment of heaven").

Maharaja Parikshit, son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna, reigned for many years and witnessed the advent of the Kali yuga, as we see also in the first canto of the *Bhagavata purana*.

Because of the curse of a young and arrogant *brahmana*, Parikshit was killed by the Takshaka snake, and upon ascending the throne his son Janamejaya began a great sacrifice aimed at destroying all the snakes in the world. On the occasion of that ceremony, Janamejaya was told the story of his ancestors - an event that brings us back to the beginning of the text of the *Mahabharata*.

## The story of Krishna

from *Bhagavata Purana*

The text of the *Mahabharata* mostly speaks about the Pandavas, and only gives passing information about Krishna, whose story is narrated in details in the *Bhagavata Purana*, also directly attributed to Veda Vyasa. The two narrations are strictly connected; at the beginning of the *Bhagavata Purana* we find that the battle of Kurukshetra has just ended, but during the night Asvatthama sneaks into the Pandavas' camp and murders the Pandavas' sons in their sleep. After describing some other passages in common with the *Mahabharata* - such as Bhishma's last speech and the departure of Dhritarastra and the Pandavas towards the conclusion of their

lives - the story returns on the Pandavas' heir Parikshit and his adventures at the beginning of Kali yuga, up to the unfortunate events that led to the curse condemning Parikshit to be killed in seven days, and his retiring on the bank of the Ganges to prepare for death.

The story of Krishna's advent and adventures is found in the 9th, 10th and 11th cantos of the *Bhagavata Purana*, after ample philosophical and theological dissertations by many great spiritual personalities, such as Sukadeva, Maitreya and Vidura, Kapila, Narada, the nine Yogendras, and stories such as those of the *avatars* Varaha, Prithu, Vamana, Matsya, Rama, and the famous Dhruva, Jada Bharata, Vritrasura, Citraketu, Prahlada, Gajendra, Ambarisha, Ajamila, and Daksha.

Sukadeva starts by describing the descendents of Yadu, the ancestor of Krishna and Balarama.

Yadu had 4 sons: Sahasrajit, Krosta, Nala and Ripu. From Sahasrajit, the eldest, through many generations, descended famous personalities such as Kartavirya Arjuna, who acquired the 8 perfections of mystic *yoga* through the teachings of the *avatara* Dattatreya. After Parasurama destroyed the dynasties of the *kshatriyas* who had fallen into *adharma*, only 5 sons of Kartavirya survived; the eldest, Jayadhvaja, continued the descendance through Talajangha, and his eldest son Vitihotra who became the father of Madhu. Madhu had 100 sons, and the eldest was named Vrishni. Thus Yadu, Madhu and Vrishni became the ancestors of the dynasties called Yadava (through Krosta), Madhava (through Vrishni's younger brothers) and Vrishni (from his sons).

Among the famous descendents of Vrishni we can mention Satvata and his descendent Andhaka. A few generations later, we find Ahuka who had 2 sons - Devaka and Ugrasena. Devaka had 4 sons, named Devavan, Upadeva, Sudeva and Devavardhana, and 7

daughters, named Dhritadeva, Santideva, Upadeva, Srideva, Devarakshita, Sahadeva and Devaki. All these 7 sisters married Vasudeva, Krishna's father. Ugrasena, Devaka's brother, had 9 sons named Kamsa, Sunama, Nyagrodha, Kanka, Sanku, Suhu, Rashtrapala, Dhristi and Tushtiman, and 5 daughters named Kamsa, Kamsavati, Kanka, Surabhumi and Rastrapalika, who married Vasudeva's younger brothers.

Vasudeva descended from another son of Vrishni, named Citraratha, and one of his famous forefathers was Bhoja, the grandfather of Devamidha, father of Sura, who became father of Vasudeva, Devabhaga, Devashrava, Anaka, Srinjaya, Syamaka, Kanka, Samika, Vatsaka and Vrika. The eldest, Vasudeva, was also called Anakadundubhi because his birth was celebrated by rolling drums. Sura also had 5 daughters, named Pritha, Shrutadeva, Shrutakirti, Shrutasrava and Rajadhidevi. King Kunti, who was Sura's friend, had no children and so he adopted Pritha, who then became known as Kunti.

One day Durvasa Rishi was a guest in the home of Kunti's father, and the girl respectfully and sincerely served the Rishi. Durvasa gifted her with the power to call any Deva personally; playfully the girl called Surya, the Sun, and she was unexpectedly blessed with a divine child, radiant like the Sun. Confused and scared, Kunti abandoned the child in a reed basket over the river. Later, Kunti married Pandu, while her sister Shrutadeva married Vriddhasharma the king of Karusha, and gave birth to Dantavakra, who in a previous lifetime had been Diti's son Hiranyaksha. Another sister of Kunti, Shrutakirti, married the king of Kekaya, Dhristaketu, and had 5 sons, the eldest named Santardana. Rajadhidevi married Jayasena and had 2 sons, Vinda and Anuvinda. Shrutashrava married the king of Cedi, Damaghosha, and gave birth to Sishupala, who in a previous lifetime had been Hiranyakashipu, brother of Hiranyaksha and son of Diti.

The daughters of Ugrasena who married Vasudeva's brothers had children, too: Kamsa the wife of Devabhaga gave birth to Citraketu and Brihadbala. Kamsavati the wife of Devashrava gave birth to Suvira and Isuman. Kanka married Kanka and gave birth to Baka, Satyajit and Purujit. Rashtrapalika married king Srinjaya and had several sons, including Vrisha and Durmarshana. Surabhumi married king Syamaka and gave birth to Harikesha and Hiranyaksha. Among Vasudeva's brothers, king Vatsaka married the Apsara Misrakeshi and had many sons, the eldest being named Vrika (like his uncle). Vrika (the brother of Vasudeva and Vatsaka) married Durvakshi and had many children, including Taksha, Pushkara and Sala. Samika married Sudamani and had many sons, including Sumitra and Arjunapala. Anaka married Karnika and had 2 sons - Ritadhama and Jaya.

Vasudeva had several wives, including Devaki, Pauravi, Rohini, Bhadra, Madira, Rochana and Ila. Rohini, the eldest, had many children, including Bala (Balarama), Gada, Sharana, Durmada, Vipula, Dhruva and Krita. Pauravi had 12 sons, of whom the most famous are Bhuta, Subhadra, Bhadrabahu, Durmada and Bhadra. Madira had several sons including Nanda, Upananda, Kritaka and Sura. Bhadra, also called Kausalya, had one son only, named Kesi. Rochana had many children, including Hasta and Hemangada. Ila had several sons, among whom Uruvalka. Dhritadeva had only one child, named Vipritha. Santideva had many sons, including Prasama and Prasita. Upadeva had 10 sons, including Rajanya, Kalpa and Varsha. Srideva had 6 sons, including Vasu, Hamsa and Suvamsa. Devarakshita had 9 sons, the most famous called Gada. Sahadeva had 8 sons, including Shruta and Pravara, who were incarnations of the celestial beings known as Vasus.

Devaki had 8 sons: Kirtiman, Sushena, Bhadrasena, Riju, Saminardana, Bhadra and Sankarshana, the *avatara* of Sesha Naga. The eighth son of Devaki was Krishna, the Supreme Personality of

God. Devaki also had one daughter, Subhadra, who married Arjuna and became the grandmother of king Parikshit.

Sukadeva explained to Parikshit the circumstances and reasons of Krishna's advent. At that time, Mother Earth was burdened with the immense armies of many asuric personalities who occupied the position of kings without having the required qualifications. Bhumi Devi, in her cow form and accompanied by Brahma and the other Devas, approached Vishnu who was reclining on the ocean of milk, and Vishnu said he was going to appear in Mathura as son of Vasudeva.

At that time, Vasudeva had just married Devaki and was taking her home. Devaki's cousin Kamsa was driving the chariot, when a voice from the sky warned him that Devaki's eighth son would kill him: immediately Kamsa was ready to kill the girl, but Vasudeva convinced him to abstain from such a horrible act, pacifying him with the promise that he would personally deliver him all her sons at birth. When he was presented with Devaki's first born son, Kamsa was moved and spared the child; the same happened with the subsequent 5 sons.

Kamsa changed his mind again after Narada Muni visited him and told him that in his previous lifetime as the *asura* Kalanemi, Kamsa had been killed by Vishnu and that same Vishnu was now appearing as the son of Vasudeva to destroy him again. Kamsa's asuric tendencies flared up.

He imprisoned his own father Ugrasena - king of the dynasties Yadu, Bhoja and Andhaka - and seized the throne, making alliances with many *asuras* such as Jarasandha the king of Magadha, as well as Pralamba, Baka, Chanura, Trinavarta, Agha, Mushtika, Arishta, Dvidida, Putana, Keshi, Dhenuka, Bana and Naraka. He threw Devaki and Vasudeva into jail, killing all their sons, and all the other relatives who did not agree with the new

regime fled to forests and distant villages, and even to other kingdoms such as Kuru, Panchala, Kekaya, Salva, Vidarbha, Nishadha, Videha and Koshala.

At that time Devaki was pregnant with her seventh son, Balarama, the *avatara* of Ananta Sesha, and she appeared to suffer a miscarriage; the child entered then the womb of another of Vasudeva's wives, Rohini, who had gone into hiding in the house of their friend Nanda in Gokula. Some time later, Nanda's wife Yasoda gave birth to a girl child, while Devaki gave birth to her eighth son, Krishna.

In the middle of the night Vasudeva escaped from prison with baby Krishna and crossed over the Yamuna river to exchange him with Yasoda's baby girl. When Kamsa tried to kill the girl, she manifested herself as Yogamaya - also known as Durga, Bhadrakali, Vijaya, Vaishnavi, Kumuda, Chandika, Krishna, Madhavi, Kanyaka, Maya, Narayani, Ishani, Sarada and Ambika. To the astonished Kamsa, Yogamaya revealed that Krishna had already taken birth elsewhere and was out of his reach.

In Gokula, Krishna became the son of Nanda and Yasoda, who celebrated his birth with great festivities and distribution of food and gifts to the people.

However, Kamsa's allies roamed the country searching for the hidden child; the first to arrive in Gokula was the *rakshasi* Putana, who tried to poison Krishna but was killed by him. Three months later, on the occasion of *utthana*, the first time when a baby is taken outside the house, Krishna killed another *rakshasa*, Satakasura, who had been hiding under a cart to attack the child.

At the completion of one year of age, Krishna was kidnapped by the *asura* Trinavarta, but killed him, too. The extraordinary child manifested also many other miraculous activities, not only to

destroy the *asuras* but also to please his devotees and village people. The family priest of the Yadus, Garga Muni, went to Gokula to cast the horoscope of little Krishna and Balarama, and revealed their divine nature and mission.

Nonetheless, the two children usually behaved just like ordinary toddlers; they had fun with the other young children, the calves and cows, and were the joy and despair of Yasoda, Rohini and all the ladies of the village, as they liked pranks and merry mischief. One day Balarama went to Yasoda to tell her that Krishna was eating dirt; Krishna denied the accusation and opened his mouth to show mother that there was no trace of dirt there. In Krishna's mouth, Yasoda had a momentary vision of the universal form, but she soon recovered and returned to see Krishna as her beloved child.

Another day, Krishna became angry because Yasoda was too busy to nurse him, so he broke the pot where the yogurt was being churned into butter, and went to sit on a mortar to eat the butter. Yasoda wanted to teach him a lesson, tying him to the mortar as punishment, but when finally she caught him after much running, she found that the rope was too short. Even after adding several other pieces of rope, still she was not able to tie up the child, until Krishna decided to allow himself to be bound. As soon as Yasoda had gone, little Krishna moved around the courtyard, pulling the heavy mortar after himself, and thus he broke down two trees, liberating the two sons of Kuvera - Nalakuvara and Manigriva - who had been cursed to become trees by Narada Rishi.

Another day, little Krishna saw a fruit vendor lady walking by the house; he decided to buy some fruits and ran outside with a handful of grains for payment. The quantity of grains was negligible, but still the lady gave the child all the fruits he could carry, and to her amazement she found her basket full of gold and jewels.

Concerned about all the strange events in the village, Nanda and the other cowherd men decided to move deeper into the forests, between Nandesvara and Mahavana, in the place called Vrindavana. They loaded their possessions on carts, and camped in the forest while building their new homes.

When Krishna and Balarama became a little older, at age 5, they started to take care of the calves. Walking after them into the forest pastures, they played all day, singing, dancing, running, swimming and frolicking together, imitating the birds, the frogs and the other animals, and enjoying the special food in their lunch boxes. Other *asuras* found them and tried to attack the two brothers, taking many deceitful forms, such as the calf Vatsa, the crane Baka, and the snake Agha, who swallowed all the little cowherd boys before he was killed by Krishna.

Brahma was watching Krishna's activities in amazement, and he decided to test his powers. The calves wandered into the forest and after some time the boys went to look for them; Brahma kidnapped them all and put them to sleep in a hidden cave for one year. Krishna responded expanding himself in many forms that perfectly resembled the calves and boys that had disappeared, so that Balarama and the adults in the village did not notice what had happened.

One year later, Brahma came back to see how Krishna had managed, and found that the parents of the boys and the mothers of the calves were even more affectionate and attached to the expansions of Krishna who played those roles than to the original boys and calves, who had been great Devas and Rishis in their previous lifetimes. Suddenly Brahma saw all of them as four-armed forms of Vishnu, decorated with divine jewels and garlands. He realized his offense and begged Krishna's forgiveness with beautiful prayers. The calves and the young cowherd boys were returned to their families, and that evening they told the story of



the killing of Aghasura, that had happened one year earlier, as if it was news of that same day, because they were unaware of the time that had elapsed.

After practicing with the calves, the young cowherd boys started to take care of the cows, and as they became older, their playing became more refined and artistic. Still Kamsa's allies attempted to kill Krishna and Balarama. Dhenukaasura took the form of a huge donkey haunting the Talavana forest, but Krishna killed him. The great snake Kaliya poisoned the waters of the Yamuna river but was vanquished by Krishna in a memorable fight; pleased by Kaliya's repentance, Krishna forgave and blessed him.

That night the people of Vrindavana, exhausted after a day filled with emotions, slept on the river bank. In the middle of the night, they found themselves surrounded by a great forest fire, but Krishna swallowed all the fire and saved them. A similar event also happened another day when the boys and the cows were alone in the Munja forest and a sudden fire was stopped by Krishna. Another day, the *asura* Pralamba disguised himself as a cowherd boy and tried to kidnap and kill Balarama, but was defeated and killed by him instead.

The *Bhagavata Purana* contains a long and beautiful description of the rainy season and the autumn in Vrindavana, offering deep metaphors about spiritual life and devotional development. This helps to introduce the central and most mysterious - and yet most popular - episode of Krishna's story: his loving dalliance with the young cowherd girls, the *gopis*, culminating in the *rasa lila* dance.

It is very easy to misinterpret this famous aspect of Krishna's character, and this is why the text of the *Bhagavata* constantly reminds that we must remember that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of God, and the *gopis* are all direct manifestations of his divine energy. Materialistic people, who do not have sufficient

intelligence and spiritual vision, may easily misunderstand the circumstances and reduce them to the ordinary passion of boys and girls. The situation is all the more dangerous because of cultural superimpositions that can create a moralistic perspective that either condemns Krishna's *lila* as illicit sexual relationships or justifies the cynical exploitation of gullible girls and women by false spiritualists attempting to imitate Krishna's activities. For this reason, it is important to remember that the discussion of the love exchanges between Krishna and the *gopis* should be always accompanied by the proper explanations and atmosphere. Only in this transcendental knowledge and consciousness one will be able to really appreciate the story.

Unfortunately too many people fail to apply the symbolic interpretation to the *rasa lila*, while they readily accept the symbolic value of the killing of the *asuras*, the devouring of the forest fires, the lifting of the Govardhana hill, and other extraordinary events described in the same story.

The various episodes of Krishna's life in Vrindavana also contain a wealth of teachings. For example, one day Krishna and Balarama and their young friends (such as Stoka Krishna, Amsu, Sridama, Subala, Arjuna, Vrishabha, Ojasvi, Devaprastha and Varuthapa) were tending to their cows near a village where some *brahmanas* were performing a traditional religious ritual, the Angirasa yajna, meant to accrue pious merits to attain the heavenly planets.

After a discussion on the magnanimous qualities of trees, that are always ready to offer everything to those who approach them, the *Bhagavata* says that the boys felt hungry and Krishna advised them to go to the *brahmanas* to ask for some food. In spite of the boys' convincing arguments, the *brahmanas* rejected their requests, and to his disappointed friends Krishna recommended to approach the *brahmanas'* wives instead. When the ladies eagerly carried the food to Krishna and Balarama, their husbands realized their

mistake born from the arrogance of material identification and attachments.

Next, the *Bhagavata Purana* introduces an episode that is even more instructive in this regard: the festival of Govardana hill. Traditionally, Vedic society observed a number of popular festivals connected to the cycles of nature and the simple life of the general population; however such festivals would become increasingly difficult to understand and perform properly in the upcoming age of Kali, with the danger of confusion and abuse. The ancient Indra puja, a festival in honor of the King of heaven and Lord of rains, included the cooking and distribution of the newly harvested grains, as well as other celebrations that have partially survived until our present day.

Krishna took the opportunity to stimulate the elders of the village towards a higher yet practical level of consciousness, bringing their attention to the importance of their daily work activities; he suggested that instead of worshiping Indra, they should worship the cows and the Govardhana hill that was their pasture, and the *brahmanas* who guided their material and spiritual progress. Nanda and the other cowherd men followed Krishna's advice, but Indra took offense and decided to punish them with a violent storm that lasted several days and flooded the entire area.

The village people turned to Krishna for help, and Krishna lifted the big hill with one hand and kept it raised for seven days to shelter all the people and their animals from the lashing rain. Amazed at that extraordinary feat, Indra repented for his arrogant mistake and humbly approached Krishna to ask forgiveness; after offering beautiful prayers, Indra worshiped Krishna with a royal ceremony of *abhisheka*, assisted by Surabhi, the mother of all cows, and by many Devas.

The Govardhana episode is immediately followed by the culmination of the loving exchanges between Krishna and the *gopis*, with their playful pastimes and with the introduction of the theme of separation, that constitutes the core factor in the science of devotional ecstasy. These chapters describing the love madness of the *gopis* will be mirrored by a subsequent part of Krishna's story in the *Bhagavata*, when Krishna will send his devotee and disciple Uddhava to Vrindavana as his messenger to the *gopis*.

The famous figure of Radha (or Vrinda) covertly appears in this episode as Krishna leaves the other *gopis* to remain alone in her company, but then abandons her soon afterwards to remain hidden for some time. Finally, attracted by the *gopis*' love and desire, Krishna appeared again and danced with them all, manifesting innumerable forms to engage each one of them exclusively. The *rasa* dance continued for the entire month of Kartika, but nobody noticed the absence of the *gopis* because they seemed to be normally sleeping in their own homes.

The wonderful activities of Krishna also included his relationship with the other village people. One day (at the end of an *ekadasi* fast) Krishna's father Nanda was taken prisoner by Varuna's servant for a minor offense while bathing, and then released when Krishna personally went to rescue him. When the other elder cowherd men heard about the extraordinary adventure, they also desired to see Krishna's glories, so Krishna sent them to bathe in the Brahma hrada, where they had the vision of Krishna in the form of Vishnu, surrounded by worshipful Devas.

Nanda was also rescued from a large snake who started to eat him up in the night after a celebration in honor of Shiva and Parvati. At the mere touch of Krishna's foot, the snake regained his previous form as the Vidyadhara Sudarshana; the body and life of a snake were in fact a result of a curse by the descendents of Angira.

Another of Kamsa's allies, Sankhachuda, arrived in Vrindavana and tried to abduct the *gopis*, but he was killed by Krishna. Arishtasura took the form of a gigantic raging bull and his friend Keshi as a massive horse, but both were killed by Krishna. Vyomasura disguised himself as a cowherd boy and abducted many of Krishna's friends, but was seized by Krishna and forced to reveal his true form. After killing him, Krishna rescued all his friends who had been kept captive in a cave.

Informed by Narada about these facts, Kamsa decided to organize a great festival in Mathura to attract Krishna and Balarama there and kill them more easily. He ordered Akrura to carry the invitation to Vrindavana, and made plans to engage the famous wrestlers Chanura, Mushtika, Sala and Toshala. Akrura was full of affection and devotion for Krishna, and took the opportunity of Kamsa's order to approach Krishna and inform him about Kamsa's plans and activities. It was decided that Krishna and Balarama would go to Mathura, followed closely by Nanda and the cowherd men, but the news deeply disturbed the young *gopis*, who could not bear the thought of being separated from Krishna. So Krishna promised them he would come back after completing his mission.

On the way to Mathura, Akrura stopped on the bank of the Yamuna river, and while he was taking bath he had a vision of Krishna and Balarama in the water, manifesting the forms of Narayana and Ananta Sesha, surrounded by a crowd of Shaktis and Devas. He was then able to understand the purpose of the mission of the Lord and his divine glories.

After reaching the gates of the city, Krishna and Balarama left Akrura and proceeded on foot, to better observe the place and the people, and be seen by the people. Especially the girls and the women were fascinated by the two handsome brothers, and showered them with scented flower petals. The city *brahmanas* came forth and offered the traditional auspicious presentations,

such as flower garlands, sandalwood paste, yogurt, water, and so on. Krishna and Balarama saw a washerman walking down the street with a number of servants carrying freshly dyed clothes, and asked him for some, but the man belonged to Kamsa's household and reacted aggressively, telling them that the king would soon punish them for their impudence. Krishna fought the washerman back and took whatever clothes he wanted.

Along the road, they came to a florist's shop, and the man immediately felt a devotional attraction to them, and honored them by offering auspicious articles and worship. Still further on, they met another servant of Kamsa's, a hunchback girl who was carrying perfumes. Kubja, whose body was crooked in three parts, was strongly attracted by Krishna, and gladly offered them whatever they wanted. Pleased, Krishna healed the girl by instantly straightening her back, and promised the girl he would go and visit her some time.

Finally arrived at the venue of the festival, Krishna and Balarama saw the great bow that was the center of the exhibition; Krishna lifted it easily and strung it so powerfully that it broke with a great noise. The two brothers easily defeated the guards who came to arrest them, and then went for another walk around the city. Kamsa was informed and felt a great anger and fear; he saw many inauspicious omens and was unable to sleep the whole night. On the next day, Krishna and Balarama returned to the festival arena and were confronted by the huge war elephant Kuvalayapida, who was goaded against them. Krishna tied his hair up and fastened his belt, then went to fight the elephant with his bare hands, eventually killing him and using his tusk to scatter the guards. The two brothers entered the arena walking majestically, carrying the elephant tusks as weapons, to the great amazement of the spectators, who saw them in different ways according to their own level of consciousness.

Next, the two famous wrestlers Chanura and Mushika challenged Krishna and Balarama to a fight, and when these were felled, the other wrestlers came forward and suffered the same fate. Enraged, Kamsa called for more soldiers, but Krishna pounced on him and dragging him down from the throne, killed him. Then Krishna delivered Devaki and Vasudeva from their imprisonment, reinstated Ugrasena on the throne, and sent word to all exiled to return without fear.

Nanda and the cowherd men realized that Krishna and Balarama would remain in Mathura as the sons of Vasudeva, and they were distraught with pain and despair. Finally, Krishna convinced them that he would return to Vrindavana soon to see them, and they were pacified.

Having being reinstated as sons of the royal dynasty, Krishna and Balarama went for formal education in the *ashrama* of Sandipani Muni, who had moved from Kashi to Avanti (Ujjain). They quickly learned all the required curriculum and before taking leave from their *guru* they offered him a gift in return.

Sandipani Muni asked for the return of his own son, who had drowned in the sacred place of Prabhasa, and immediately Krishna and Balarama went to the ocean to meet Varuna and reclaim the boy. From Varuna, Krishna heard that the boy had been killed by the *asura* Panchajanya, so he decided to turn to Yama, the Lord of death, and he was thus able to return Sandipani Muni's son to his parents.

Back in Mathura, Krishna was anxious to comfort his devotees in Vrindavana, so he called Uddhava - disciple of Brihaspati and advisor of the Vrishni dynasty - and asked him to go there with a message of affection and concern. Uddhava reached Vrindavana after a day's journey, and saw the cowherd men return home with their cows from the pastures. Nanda and Yasoda welcomed him

and emotionally remembered Krishna and his activities and qualities. They still constantly thought about him and missed him terribly.

Uddhava comforted them with spiritual instructions, reminding them that Krishna lives in the hearts of all beings, and also informed them of Krishna's promise to come back and see them. If the meeting with Krishna's foster parents had been emotional, Uddhava found the *gopis* even more desperately suffering for Krishna's absence, so much that they appeared to have completely lost their minds. One of the *gopis* was talking to a bumblebee (*bhramari*), expressing her deepest feelings of love, passion and separation from Krishna. Then Uddhava delivered a long and affectionate message from Krishna, containing deep spiritual and transcendental truths on the highest levels of devotion. Uddhava remained several months in Vrindavana, talking with its residents about Krishna and comforting them.

Krishna also kept his promise to visit Kubja. After meeting Akrura in his home, he sent him to Hastinapura with a message for the Pandavas who lived there. Akrura went to the Kurus' capital and met Bhisma, Vidura and Kunti, Bahlika and his son Somadatta, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, Karna, Duryodhana, Asvatthama and especially the five sons of Pandu. Kunti and Vidura explained that Dhritarastra's sons were violently envious and had tried to kill the young Pandavas many times, so Akrura tried to convince Dhritarastra to take proper action, but unsuccessfully.

In the meantime, the two widows of Kamsa - Asti and Prapti - had returned to the house of their father, king Jarasandha of Magadha, and asked him to avenge them. Jarasandha gathered 23 *akshauhinis* - 503,010 war chariots, 503,010 war elephants, 1,509,030 horsemen and 2,515,050 foot soldiers - and went to besiege Mathura. The huge army surrounded the city like an ocean, and the residents of the city were very scared. Krishna and



Balarama went on a sortie, with the precise purpose of challenging Jarasandha to a duel. The enemies attacked but Krishna fought valiantly, slaughtering many warriors and capturing the king. Jarasandha conducted 17 campaigns against Mathura, and each time he was defeated by Krishna single-handedly. Then Jarasandha found some more allies and especially the savage Kalayavana.

Krishna realized that while he was engaged in fight against Kalayavana, Jarasandha could harm the residents of Mathura, so he arranged to move all his people to a new fortress city, Dvaraka, that he built in the ocean with the help of Visvakarma. When the people of Mathura were safely sheltered there, Krishna and Balarama again walked out to face Jarasandha and Kalayavana, and pretended to run away to lure them far from the city. Finally Krishna reached a cave in the mountains and got inside, followed in hot pursuit by Kalayavana, who unwittingly woke up Muchukunda, who had been sleeping in that cave for many years to recover from his strenuous efforts in fighting to support the Devas against the *asuras*. The powerful king Muchukunda killed Kalayavana and then saw Krishna in his form as Vishnu, and had a spiritual conversation with him. Then in his new enlightenment he left for the Himalayas to fully engage in spiritual *sadhana*.

Krishna and Balarama returned to Mathura, where they destroyed the Yavana army. When Jarasandha attacked them, they again pretended to run away to lure Jarasandha in pursuit; they climbed a mountain and Jarasandha started a fire to kill them, but they jumped off and departed for Dvaraka without being spotted, thus leaving Jarasandha under the delusion that they were dead, to dissuade him from further attacks.

In Dvaraka, Krishna and Balarama entered their family life. Balarama married Revati, the daughter of Raivata the king of Anarta, and Krishna married Rukmini, the daughter of king Bhismaka of Vidarbha.

Actually Rukmini had been promised in marriage to Sisupala (son of Damaghosa the king of Cedi) by her brother Rukmi (who was hostile to Krishna), but she was in love with Krishna and wanted to marry him only. So Rukmini secretly sent a messenger to Krishna, confessing her love and desire, and asking him to abduct her before her arranged marriage.

Krishna went immediately to the rescue racing there by night, and in the morning he reached the marriage venue, followed by Balarama with a great army for support. In the meantime Rukmini was visiting the temple of Durga to obtain her blessings, and was anxiously praying for Krishna's success. Leaving the temple, beautiful Rukmini was searching the crowd of the princes assembled for her marriage, and her heart throbbed seeing Krishna walking majestically like a lion to her, lifting her off her feet and seating her in his war chariot. Rukmini's brother, Sisupala and the baffled princes were angered and, wearing their weapons, launched into hot pursuit to engage Krishna in battle and take Rukmini back, but they were badly defeated. Rukmi was put under such pressure that his sister had to intercede for him and save his life. Finally the happy couple was able to proceed to Dvaraka without further disturbance to be united in marriage.

Rukmini's first son, Pradyumna, was kidnapped by the *asura* Sambara, who threw him into the sea to get him drowned. However, Pradyumna was swallowed whole by a fish, that was promptly caught by fishermen and delivered to the kitchen of Sambara's palace. The cooks found the child still alive and entrusted him to a palace maid called Mayavati; in their previous lifetimes she had been Kamadeva's wife Rati, and Pradyumna had been Kamadeva himself, reduced to ashes by Shiva's angry glance when he tried to disturb his meditation. Pradyumna grew up quickly, and when he was strong enough, Mayavati revealed him his past and present situation, and taught him the mystic

knowledge required to defeat the powerful *asura*, who had been a student of Maya Danava. After a fierce fight using the mystic weapons of Guhyakas, Gandharvas, Pisachas, Uragas and Rakshasas, Pradyumna was able to kill Sambara and returned to Dvaraka with his bride Mayavati, to the great happiness of Rukmini. Narada Muni visited Dvaraka on that occasion and confirmed Mayavati's story.

Krishna also married several other princesses, including Satyabhama and Jambavati, whose story is connected to the Syamantaka jewel. This powerful jewel had been given by Surya himself to his devotee Satrajit, and besides providing protection from many evils, it produced a considerable amount of gold daily.

One day Satrajit visited Dvaraka wearing the Syamantaka, and all the people were very impressed. Krishna considered the value of the jewel for his own kingdom and people, and asked Satrajit to present it to him in friendship. Satrajit refused. Some time later, Satrajit's brother Prasena took the jewel on a hunting expedition and was killed by a lion; the beast dragged his body into a cave without realizing that it was the home of Jambavan, the bear-man who had fought against Ravana as an ally of Ramachandra. Jambavan easily killed the lion and seeing the pretty jewel, appropriated it as a toy for his own young son.

In the meantime Satrajit became distraught for the disappearance of his brother and suspected Krishna of foul play; the rumor spread and Krishna was informed, so to clear himself of the false accusation of murder and robbery he went after Prasena's tracks in the jungle and found the dead lion and Prasena's body at the mouth of the cave. The other members of the search party did not dare enter the cave, so Krishna proceeded alone, and soon found Jambavan's son playing with the jewel. Immediately Krishna demanded the jewel to be returned, but Jambavan defended his booty with a hard fight; at length Jambavan realized that Krishna

was no ordinary man and in fact recognized him as his beloved Ramachandra. Thus he gladly offered the Syamantaka as well his own daughter Jambavati as a bride to Krishna.

In the meantime the search party, after waiting for several days, concluded that Krishna had been killed or was missing, and returned to Dvaraka to give the bad news to the people. Shocked and scared, all the residents of Dvaraka prayed to Mother Durga to restore Krishna to them; the oracle answered that Krishna would return soon. Just at that time Krishna entered the city with the jewel and his new bride, and Satrajit felt deeply ashamed and aggrieved for having suspected Krishna, so he spontaneously offered him the jewel as a gift and also presented his daughter Satyabhama as a bride. Krishna forgave Satrajit and asked him to keep the jewel in his name and to pray for the protection of the entire kingdom.

After the marriage ceremonies, Krishna and Balarama left for Hastinapura, because they heard that the Pandavas and their mother Kunti had been killed in a fire; they met Bhishma, Kripa, Vidura, Gandhari and Drona to collect information.

In the meantime, in Dvaraka a few members of the Yadu dynasty hatched a plot to kill Satrajit and take the Syamantaka jewel for themselves. One of the conspirators, Satadhanva, sneaked into Satrajit's house and murdered him. Satyabhama ordered the dead body to be preserved in oil and went to give the sad news to Krishna and Balarama, who were horrified and aggrieved by the bad turn of events. Krishna immediately returned to Dvaraka to punish the killer and retrieve the jewel; the other conspirators Kritavarma and Akrura abandoned Satadhanva who then fled from Dvaraka but was pursued to Mithila, where Krishna killed him. Back in Dvaraka, Krishna investigated to locate the lost jewel, until Akrura shamefully returned the Syamantaka to Satyabhama, Satrajit's heir, in the presence of the entire city assembly.

After some time the Pandavas resurfaced to dispel the rumor of their death, and Krishna went to meet them in Hastinapura, together with their mother Kunti and their new bride Draupadi. Krishna stayed with the Pandavas for some time, often roaming the kingdom in the company of his close friend Arjuna; in one of such journeys they descended to the Yamuna river to drink and bathe, and found a beautiful girl there strolling along the bank. The girl, Kalindi (a manifestation of the Yamuna river), said that she was the daughter of the Sun and lived in the river, hoping to get Krishna as a husband. Krishna obliged and welcomed Kalindi to return with him to Dvaraka.

Krishna also married Mitravinda, daughter of his aunt Rajadhidevi and sister of the king of Avanti (Ujjain), who was an ally of Duryodhana, and Satya the daughter of king Nagnajit of Kausalya by winning her *svayamvara* tournament. He married princess Bhadra, daughter of his aunt Srutakirti the queen of Kaikeya, and Lakshmana, the daughter of the king of Madra.

In the same period the Pandavas went to the Khandava forest to build their new independent city, Khandavaprastha, and Agni helped them by consuming the trees and clearing the grounds; on that occasion Agni offered Arjuna a wonderful chariot with white horses, a great bow and an inexhaustible quiver of arrows, and an invincible armor. Maya Danava also helped by building a great palace and assembly hall for the Pandavas.

After the Pandavas had settled in their new home, Krishna returned to Dvaraka. There he received the visit of Indra, the king of the heavenly planets, who asked his help to defeat the *asura* Bhauma (also called Naraka) and retrieve the earrings of Aditi (Indra's mother) and Varuna's royal umbrella, that the *asura* had stolen. Krishna called Garuda and, together with Satyabhama, journeyed to Bhauma's capital, Pragytishapura ("the city where the sun rises first"), east of the Himalayas. Krishna attacked the fortress and

engaged the *asura* in open battle, also killing Bhauma's allies such as Mura. Finally Krishna entered the city and delivered 16,000 princesses that had been abducted and kept prisoners in the *asura*'s palace. All those girls felt very grateful and took shelter in Krishna, and being strongly attracted to him they expressed the desire to become his wives; Krishna arranged for them to be carried in elephant palanquins to Dvaraka, while he and Satyabhama proceeded to Svarga to restore Aditi's earrings to Indra. While visiting Indra's palace, Satyabhama saw a wonderful *parijata* tree and asked Krishna to get it for her; Indra felt offended and in spite of all the favors he had received, he tried to fight Krishna to get the tree back.

In all, Krishna had 16,108 queens, each with her own private independent palace, where she lived with one of the personal emanations that Krishna manifested to remain in their company simultaneously. The queens saw that Krishna never left their palace, engaging in loving exchanges, pleasant conversations, fun games, and accepting their intimate personal service. Each queen had 10 sons.

Rukmini's sons were Pradyumna, Charudesna, Sudeshna, Charudeha, Sucharu, Charugupta, Bhadracharu, Charuchandra, Vicharu and Charu. Satyabhama's sons were Bhanu, Subhanu, Svarbhanu, Prabhanu, Bhanuman, Chandrabhanu, Brihadbhanu, Atibhanu, Sribhanu and Pratibhanu. Jambavati's sons were Samba, Sumitra, Purujit, Satajit, Sahasrajit, Vijaya, Citraketu, Vasuman, Dravida and Kratu. Among all his sons, Samba was most closely attached to Krishna. The sons of Satya (Nagnajiti) were Vira, Chandra, Ashvasena, Citragu, Vegavan, Vrisha, Ama, Shanku, Vasu and Kunti. The sons of Kalindi were Shruta, Kavi, Vrisha, Vira, Subahu, Bhadra, Shanti, Darsha, Purnamasa and Somaka. The sons of Madra were Praghosa, Gatravan, Simha, Bala, Prabala, Urdhaga, Mahashakti, Saha, Oja and Aparajita. The sons of

Mitravinda were Vrika, Harsha, Anila, Gridhra, Vardhana, Unnada, Mahamsa, Pavana, Vahni and Kshudhi. The sons of Bhadra were Sangramajit, Brihatsena, Sura, Praharana, Arijit, Jaya, Subhadra, Vama, Ayur and Satyaka.

All the descendents and the wives of Krishna were great spiritual personalities who had taken birth to assist him in his mission, but Rukmini was the first queen. The narration of the *Bhagavata Purana* includes a playful conversation between Krishna and Rukmini, in which he pretended he felt inadequate as a husband and suggested she should remarry and choose a better man. This gave Rukmini, however shocked, the opportunity to reply with strong arguments about Krishna's supreme spiritual position.

Rukmini's son Pradyumna married her cousin Rukmavati, daughter of Rukmi, after defeating all the assembled princes at her *svayamvara*. Rukmini's daughter Charumati married Bali, the son of Kritavarma. Later, Rukmi gave his grand-daughter Rochana in marriage to his sister's grand-son Aniruddha (son of Pradyumna). On the occasion of that marriage, Krishna and Balarama went to Bhojavati, Rukmi's city, accompanied by many youngsters of the Yadu dynasty. After the festivities, the king of Kalinga goaded Rukmi into challenging Balarama to a dice game, hoping to humiliate Balarama, who was not particularly skilled at dice. In fact Balarama lost one game after another, paying first 100 coins, then 1,000, and then 10,000. When the stakes went up to 100,000 coins, Balarama finally won the game but Rukmi refused to accept defeat and started to insult his guests - ranting that Krishna and Balarama were nothing but cowherd boys, who knew nothing about the life of *kshatriyas*, what to speak of the princes of royal order. At that, Balarama raged up and brought his mace down on Rukmi, killing him on the spot. Then he smashed the teeth of the king of Kalinga, and all the others fled precipitously under the storm of blows.

The *Bhagavata Purana* also narrates several other episodes of the adventures of the Yadu dynasty. One of the most interesting is the story of king Nriga, son of Ikshvaku, who had been turned into a lizard as a consequence of his bad *karma*, and was delivered by the touch of Krishna's hand. The Yadu family was out on a picnic in a forest, and feeling thirsty they started to look for a water well; this is how they discovered the large lizard. When he returned to his previous form, Nriga told his story and how he had been condemned to that position because of a quarrel with a *brahmana* over a cow that had been given in charity and had mistakenly been assigned to someone else. Krishna took the opportunity of the situation to teach his sons about the dangers of committing offenses to a *brahmana* and trying to take away his property, even if that was given as a donation.

Aniruddha, the son of Pradyumna, also married Usha, the daughter of the *asura* Bana, the eldest of the 100 sons of Bali Maharaja, and the king of the wonderful city of Sonitapura. Bana was a great devotee of Shiva, and he had received from him many boons, including 1000 powerful arms. However, he became arrogant and one day complained that he was unable to find a worthy opponent for a fight; Shiva replied that he would soon get one.

One night Bana's daughter Usha had a dream; she was in the company of a very handsome young man and they were enjoying together. Waking up suddenly, the girl was smitten with love and restless with the desire of discovering who that man was. Her close friend Citralekha, daughter of Bana's minister Kumbhanda, was sleeping in the same apartment and heard Usha crying. She became very curious about the strange dream, because Usha had never been in the company of boys or men, so she offered to make a painting of the man of Usha's dream and find out who he was. After drawing many portraits of Devas, Gandharvas, Siddhas, Charanas, Pannagas, Daityas, Vidyadharas and Yakshas,



Citrlekha tried with the main royal dynasties of human beings, and when she drew Aniruddha, Usha immediately recognized him. With her magic powers, Chitrlekha flew to Dvaraka and carried the sleeping Aniruddha to Usha's apartment in Sonitapura.

For many days Aniruddha secretly remained in the company of Usha, with great happiness of both of them, until his presence was detected by the security guards who stood outside the apartment. Furious, Bana attacked the young man and took him prisoner.

Four months had passed since Aniruddha's mysterious disappearance from Dvaraka, and the Yadus were starting to get really worried. Narada Muni arrived with the news of Aniruddha's captivity and immediately Krishna and Balarama left in a rescue mission, accompanied by Pradyumna, Satyaki, Gada, Samba, Sharana, Nanda, Upananda, Bhadra and other strong warriors, and 12 *akshauhini* armies, and they lay siege to the city of Sonitapura.

In the ensuing battle even Shiva appeared personally, accompanied by Kartikeya and his *pramatha ganas*. Krishna fought Shiva, Pradyumna battled Kartikeya, Balarama against Kumbandha and Kupakarna, Samba was pitted against Bana's son and Satyaki against Bana himself. Brahma and all the Devas came to watch the amazing spectacle, where the Personalities of God were playing by exhibiting their *virya rasa*.

Finally Krishna faced Bana, and the Shiva jvara was opposed by the Vishnu jvara and vanished. Krishna systematically cut off almost all the 1000 arms of the *asura* leaving only 4 of them as a favor to Shiva. Also, Krishna remembered the promise he had made as Vishnu to Prahlada, the ancestor of Bana, and granted Bana a long life and the position of personal servant and companion of Shiva. At that point Bana called for Usha and Aniruddha and delivered both to Krishna, blessing their marriage.

Around the same period, Balarama journeyed to Vrindavana to visit his friends and relatives because he missed them very much. He was welcomed very emotionally by Nanda and Yasoda, who treated him as their beloved child, and met also all the cowherd men. Everyone was anxious to hear about Krishna and the Yadus, and his adventures and deed were repeated by all. The *gopis* also were overwhelmed by emotion when Balarama delivered them a personal message from Krishna. Balarama stayed in Vrindavana for two months, and comforted the *gopis* spending many nights playing with them, especially in a wonderful garden on the bank of the Yamuna, where the *varuni* honey flowed from a tree hollow. After much dancing and playing, Balarama wanted to have a swim in the cool waters of the river and called the Yamuna; as the river did not rush to him quickly, Balarama used his plough to change the river's bed and get her waters exactly where he wanted them.

One day, Balarama's sweet time with the *gopis* was disturbed by an evil monkey man called Dvividā, an ally of Narakasura, who had been roaming the region terrorizing the people. Dvividā arrived in the place where Balarama was playing with the *gopis* and was immediately envious; he broke the honey pot and started to pull at the girls' clothes. Balarama threw some stones at him to scare him away, but Dvividā attacked him. The fight was fierce, as Dvividā uprooted a tree to oppose Balarama's famous mace and also threw large stones, but finally Balarama killed him with a fist blow.

While Balarama was in Vrindavana, the king of Karusha sent a challenge to Krishna. That king, named Paundraka, had convinced himself he was God and used to dress up as Vishnu, carrying the divine symbols and a flag with the image of Garuda. Encouraged by his flattering courtiers, Paundraka sent a messenger accusing Krishna of falsely impersonating Vishnu, and threatening to punish him for such arrogance. Although the challenge had appeared mostly hilarious to the Yadus, Krishna decided to stand up to it and

left for Kasi, where Paundraka was living as a guest of the king there. Both Paundraka and his friend the king of Kasi went into battle with 3 *akshauhini* armies, but Krishna easily killed them all, and threw their heads back into the city. The son of the king of Kashi, named Sudakshina, was aggrieved and angered, and swore to avenge his father; after the funeral rites he started a special sacrifice to evoke a suitable demon to be unleashed against Krishna and all the Yadus. The Avenger was a terrifying giant, with coppery red hair and beard, armed with a fiery trident, and on the order of Sudakshina he departed for the destruction of Dvaraka. Krishna was informed of the danger and quickly launched his Sudarshana chakra, that forced the Avenger to turn back and to vent his rage on the city of Kasi itself, burning it to ashes.

Another romantic story in the adventures of the Yadus is the love between Samba (son of Krishna and Jambavati) and Lakshmana (the only daughter of Duryodhana). Samba went to her *svayamvara* and took her away, but he was attacked by all the Kurus - Karna, Sala, Bhuri, Yajnaketu and Suyodhana - and after a fierce battle he was taken a prisoner. The news arrived in Dvaraka and all the Yadus became very angry - war was averted only by the intervention of Balarama, who had just returned from Vrindavana.

Balarama went to Hastinapura accompanied by Uddhava in the attempt to solve the crisis, and was soon met by the leaders of the Kurus. However, when Balarama remarked that Samba had been overpowered in unfair fight, the Kurus lost their cordiality and in fact started to insult the Yadus in general and Balarama himself.

Amused, Balarama let the Kurus return to their homes, then he struck his plough into the ground and started to drag off the entire city towards the Ganges river, with the clean intention of drowning it there. Terrified, the Kurus realized their mistake; they immediately delivered Samba and Lakshmana to the presence of Balarama and begged for forgiveness.

After Samba's marriage, the *Bhagavata Purana* tells about Narada Muni's visit to the city of Dvaraka, with a detailed description of the daily life of Krishna and the Yadu dynasty. The city, rich with many beautiful gardens, parks and several ponds, had 900,000 royal palaces made of crystal and silver, studded with emeralds and other valuable stones, and furnished with golden fittings. The 16,108 palaces of Krishna's queens had coral pillars studded with diamonds, and their walls were decorated with sapphires; the beds had curtains of pearls and the jewelled lamps reflected and amplified the light. Clouds of scented incense smoke drifted from the windows and intoxicated peacocks danced on the terraces.

Seeing Narada arriving in a palace, Krishna personally welcomed him with the traditional rituals, washing his feet and offering various pleasing articles. The same scene was repeated in the same way in each palace, where Krishna appeared to be exclusively present all the time in the company of his dear wife - laying in bed, playing with his children, engaged in a dice game, taking bath, offering oblations in the fire, having lunch, consulting with ministers, practicing weapon combat, distributing food and gifts to *brahmanas*, swimming in the pool, listening to the recitation of the *Puranas*, checking the accounting, sitting in meditation, keeping company with the elders, studying battle strategy or alliances, or planning social work such as the digging of public wells, creating parks and accommodation for travellers.

Deeply in love with their lord, Krishna's queens composed poems about him talking to the moon, the clouds, the sweet breezes, the ocean, the rivers, the swans and other noble birds, but Krishna rose early every morning to attend his daily duties in a perfectly exemplary way. After the ritual touching of the water for purification, he sat in meditation some time before dawn, in the special hour called *brahma muhurta*. Then he took a full bath, donned fresh clothes and performed the traditional oblations to the

sacred fire, silently chanted the Gayatri *mantra*, worshiped the rising sun, the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitris, and finally went to offer his homage to the *brahmanas* and the elders of the family. He then engaged in the duties of his *varna* - distributing donations to qualified *brahmanas*, making sure that all the people were happy and satisfied, and providing whatever they needed. After honoring friends, ministers and wives, he took his breakfast and then walked to the Sudharma assembly hall, where he sat with the Yadu leaders and held court to the sound of the Vedic hymns recited by the *brahmanas*.

The great assembly hall of the Yadus was the place where envoys came to deliver their messages and anyone could present their requests. One day a messenger came, to inform the Yadu leaders that king Jarasandha had captured 20,000 kings and kept them prisoners in the Girivraja fortress. Those kings had refused to become his allies and now they begged Krishna to help them; they knew Krishna had already defeated Jarasandha for 17 times.

At that time Narada Muni arrived at the assembly; Krishna asked him what was the Pandava's position on that situation, and Narada reported that Yudhisthira was planning to perform the Rajasuya yajna, and that action would be considered as a challenge by Jarasandha. Uddhava suggested that the Yadus could make an alliance with the Pandavas to defeat Jarasandha.

So Krishna, accompanied by his wives, went to Indraprastha, the new capital built by the Pandavas. The caravan had many palanquins and carts carrying luggage, provisions, clothing, blankets, and included many servants and practically the entire Yadu army.

The Pandavas - Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva - rushed to welcome them, accompanied by all their relatives and friends. At their palace, Krishna was greeted by Kunti and her

daughters in law, especially Draupadi and Subhadra. Draupadi offered many presents to Krishna's queens, and Yudhisthira showed Krishna the apartments reserved for their guests. On Krishna's advice, Yudhisthira sent Nakula and Sahadeva to collect tributes from neighboring kingdoms, and then Krishna, Arjuna and Bhimasena went to Jarasandha's fortress, Girivraja, dressed as *brahmanas*. They reached there at the time when Jarasandha received the *brahmanas* and the guests, and asked him to grant them a favor, reminding him that the great kings of the past, such as Harischandra, Rantideva, Unchavritti Mudgala, Sibi and Bali - had earned vast fame by their generous gifts.

Jarasandha observed the powerfully built bodies of his visitors, and the marks left by the bows on their arms; he noticed their majestic manners and their deep voices, and immediately realized they were not *brahmanas* but *kshatriyas* of the highest order. However, he was bound by the circumstances and could only promise to grant their wishes: then Krishna revealed his identity and the identity of his companions, and asked for a duel. Jarasandha replied, "I will not fight against you, because you are a coward. I will not fight with Arjuna either, because he is too young and frail. But I can wrestle Bhima, who is as strong as I am.". So Jarasandha and Bhima went outside the city and started a mace duel, moving like expert dancers, and the clash of their weapons sounded like thunder or the tusks of great elephants in a fight. When the maces broke down, they continued fighting with their fists, but still there was no clear winner.

Krishna knew the secret of Jarasandha's superhuman strength: when he was a small child he had been adopted by the *rakshasi* Jara, who had joined the two halves of his body with a spell. Picking up a twig, Krishna bifurcated it in front of Bhima, and Bhima took the hint by ripping Jarasandha's body in half lengthwise.

After killing Jarasandha, Krishna and the Pandavas released the captive kings, who immediately swore allegiance to them in gratitude; Jarasandha's successor also paid tribute to the Pandavas, and they returned triumphantly to Indraprastha to celebrate the grand ritual of enthroning Yudhisthira.

The priests appointed for the rituals were Vyasa, Bharadvaja, Sumantu, Gotama, Asita, Vasistha, Cyavana, Kanva, Maitreya, Kavasa, Trita, Visvamitra, Vamadeva, Sumati, Jaimini, Kratu, Paila, Parasara, Garga, Vaisampayana, Atharva, Kashyapa, Dhaumya, Parasurama, Asuri, Vitihotra, Madhucchanda, Virasena and Akrtavrana. Invitations were sent to Drona, Bhishma, Kripa, Dhritarashtra and his sons, and also to Vidura and many neighboring kings.

On the day when the *soma* juice was prepared, Yudhisthira was required to offer formal worship (*agra puja*) to the most worthy person present in the assembly, and Sahadeva proposed Krishna should be chosen for that honor. Everyone approved enthusiastically, except for Sisupala, the son of Damaghosa, who had always been a rival and an enemy to Krishna, since his promised bride Rukmini had eloped with Krishna.

Seething with envy and anger, Sishpala stood in the assembly and started to insult Krishna in public, accusing him of making a mockery of the *varna* system because as a cowherd he had dared to take the position of *kshatriya* of the royal order. While the Pandavas and the other warriors showed their anger and threatened to silence the offender, Krishna patiently tolerated the ranting in silence for quite some time.

Finally, Sishupala took up his weapons and challenged Krishna's supporters to a fight, and Krishna suddenly threw his Sudarshana, beheading Sisupala cleanly. To the great surprise of everyone, a light came out from Sishupala's body and went to merge into

Krishna. Another of Krishna's close companions, playing the role of a rival, had concluded his mission and returned to the spiritual abode.

Another ominous disruption in Yudhishthira's festival was the storming away of Duryodhana, filled with rage, envy and humiliation. Yudhishthira's grand success was intolerable for Duryodhana, who had been convinced he had defeated his cousin by having him exiled from the Kuru capital, but the royal palace built for the Pandavas by Maya Danava was full of optical effects and confused him completely. He mistook a very shiny floor for a shallow pool of water and unnecessarily lifted his clothes to walk through it, and soon afterwards he walked into real water that looked like a dry floor, to the loud laughs of Draupadi and the ladies.

After the completion of the Rajasuya yajna, Krishna and the Yadus returned to Dvaraka. There another danger had already appeared.

King Salva had heard about the death of his friend Sisupala and decided to wage war against Krishna with a great army and a wonderful aircraft called Saubha, built by Maya Danava. From this aircraft, Salva bombed the city of Dvaraka with various weapons, rocks, tree trunks, lightning bolts, snakes and hail storms, just like the famous Tripura aircrafts had wrecked havoc on the earth in ancient times. The warriors who had remained to protect the city - Pradyumna, Satyaki, Charudesna, Samba, Akrura and his brothers, Hardikya, Bhanuvinda, Gada, Suka and Sharana - fought back and killed many warriors in Salva's army that was laying siege to the city. However, during the battle Pradyumna was knocked unconscious by a fierce mace blow, and was temporarily carried off by his chariot driver. After regaining consciousness, Pradyumna returned to the battle, that continued for 27 days and night. Then Krishna arrived from Indraprastha and immediately engaged Salva.



Salva was able to hit Krishna's left arm with an arrow, and this feat immensely increased his pride, so he started to insult Krishna openly, accusing him of Sisupala's assassination. Krishna replied by a well-placed and violent stroke of his mace, and Salva suddenly disappeared. Then a distraught man approached Krishna, saying he had been sent by Krishna's mother Devaki. "Salva has captured your father Vasudeva," said the man, and indeed Salva reappeared dragging along a prisoner that looked like Vasudeva. "This is your dear father," Salva shouted, and beheaded him with his sword.

For a moment, Krishna was horrified by that cowardly act, but then he could see it was an illusion, and attacked his aircraft, shattering it and sending it broken into the ocean. Salva jumped out and tried to fight back, but Krishna killed him.

Salva's relative and friend Dantavakra rushed into the battle. Like Sishpala, he was Krishna's cousin and sworn enemy. Krishna faced him in a mace duel and killed him, too.

During that period there was an important solar eclipse. Many people from the kingdoms of Matsya, Usinara, Kaushalya, Vidarbha, Srinjaya, Kamboja, Kaikaya, Madra, Kunti, Anarta and Kerala went in pilgrimage to Samanta panchaka, near the Kurukshetra field. The Yadus left some warriors to protect the city of Dvaraka and journeyed to Kurukshetra for the traditional rituals - ablutions, fasting, and distribution of gifts to *brahmanas*. The Kurus were also present, and the people of Vrindavana as well.

The meeting of Nanda, Yasoda and the cowherd men and women with Krishna was very emotional. Rohini and Devaki embraced Yasoda, Nanda greeted Vasudeva congratulating him for his great fortune, but the young *gopi* lovers of Krishna were able to attract him to a quiet private place to talk to him freely at last and be comforted by him after the long separation.

In the meantime Draupadi sat with Krishna's queens and listened to their stories and how they had married Krishna.

Great Rishis also arrived at Kurukshetra, and were eager to meet Krishna and Balarama. Among them were Vyasa, Narada, Cyavana, Devala and Asita, Visvamitra, Satananda, Bharadvaja e Gautama, Parasurama with his disciples, Vasistha, Galava, Bhrigu, Pulastya and Kasyapa, Atri, Markandeya, Brihaspati, Dvita, Trita, Ekata, the four Kumaras, Angira, Agastya, Yajnavalkya and Vamadeva.

Krishna welcomed them and said, "Now our life has become successful, because we have been blessed with the presence of such great masters. Many people recognize the Deity in the temple but are unable to see you, who are the personification of sacred places of pilgrimage better than any river or water body, or any image made from stone or metal. Your presence instantly purifies anyone. Those who identify with the body composed by material elements, who believe that wife and family are permanent relationships, who think that the land of their birth is worthy of worship, or who perform pilgrimage only to water without seeking the company of the wise spiritualists, are no better than animals."

In reply, the Rishis glorified Krishna, speaking of the inconceivable illusory power of God, the Yogamaya, that causes his appearance in this world in what seems to be a human form.

Inspired by the words of the great Rishis, Krishna's father Vasudeva approached them and asked them instructions about the actions to be performed. Narada Muni was amazed, "Vasudeva wants to know from us what is his duty. The people who live on the bank of the Ganges often travel to other places for pilgrimage, facing many difficulties, because familiarity and habit confuse one's appreciation for what we already have."

The Rishis sat with Vasudeva in the presence of Krishna and Balarama, and started their explanations. "Karma is neutralized by further actions. For married people, the sacred duty to control the mind and attain liberation is the performance of vedic rituals to worship Vishnu, Yajna, by investing one's honestly earned wealth in his service. An intelligent person can become detached from the desire for wealth by distributing charity and engaging in sacrifice; he will learn to control sex urges by faithfully engaging in family life, and he will overcome the attraction for the heavenly planets by studying the effects of time. One who has attained this level of consciousness will retire into the forest to engage in austerity. All the twice born - *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* - must repay their debts to the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitris, by performing the required rituals, studying the scriptures and raising children."

Under the instructions of the Rishis, Vasudeva performed the traditional rituals in the sacred place of Kurushektra, in the presence of all the kings and queen. His body anointed with fresh butter and his eyes purified by the black collyrium, resplendent as the moon among his 18 well-decorated wives, Vasudeva was initiated for the ritual in accordance to the rules of the scriptures. At the end of the sacrifice, the valuable clothes and ornaments they had donned were given in charity, together with many other gifts. The Yadus and the people of Vrindavana remained together at Kurukshetra for 3 months, then they returned to their homes.

Back in Dvaraka, Vasudeva was still meditating on the teachings of the Rishis. One morning, as usual, Krishna and Balarama went to offer their respects to Vasudeva and Devaki, and Vasudeva spoke about his realizations: "I am now convinced that you are the source of creation and the supreme Soul in the hearts of all beings. Now I want to abandon the illusion of the identification with the material body, that makes me think that you are simply my sons." Krishna smiled, bowed to Vasudeva and replied, "What you say is

true, but you, my brother and all these people in Dvaraka, are all parts of this supreme existence, the eternal and all-pervading Brahman. The supreme Soul is this Brahman, and although it is one, it manifests in so many forms through the qualities of its own nature."

Devaki also listened in amazement to that conversation, and remembering her six children who had been cruelly killed by Kamsa, she felt a new hope in her heart. "You are the supreme Personality of God, appeared in this world for the mission of destroying the degraded people who are a burden to Mother Earth. I heard that on the request of your *guru*, you rescued his long lost son from death itself. I beg you, please bring back my sons to me."

Krishna and Balarama immediately descended into Sutala and went to meet Bali Maharaja who lives there. Bali happily worshiped them, prayed to be delivered from any material attachment to family and position, and asked how he could be of service. Krishna told him, "Under the reign of the first Manu, the Rishi Marici had 6 sons from his wife Uma; these heavenly beings committed the offense of deriding Brahma and thus they were cursed to take birth as the sons of Hiranyakasipu. Next they took birth as the sons of Devaki and were killed by Kamsa. Their mother is still aggrieved by their death, so we have come to take them back to earth and deliver them from their curse."

Smara, Udgitha, Parisvanga, Patanga, Kshudrabhrit and Ghrini were thus summoned, and Krishna took them back to Devaki. Purified by the touch of Krishna's mother, the six children were able to regain their heavenly form, and returned to their exalted position.

In that period, Arjuna was traveling to various places of pilgrimage. He arrived in Prabhasa (Somanatha) near Dvaraka, and heard that Balarama wanted to arrange the marriage of his sister

Subhadra to Duryodhana, but all the other members of the Yadu family were displeased with the idea. Arjuna thought he could try to win Subhadra for himself, so he went to Dvaraka incognito, in the dress of a *sadhu*, and he remained there for the four months of the rainy season as a guest of the Yadus. He met Subhadra and immediately fell in love with her and was loved back; with the approval of Krishna and the other Yadus he arranged to abduct Subhadra on the occasion of a temple festival. When he heard the news, Balarama became very angry but his anger subsided after Krishna explained everything - then he sent his blessings and many gifts to the newly weds.

Another incident narrated by the *Bhagavata Purana* is Krishna's visit to his devotees Srutadeva and Bahulasva, who lived in Mithila, capital of the Videha kingdom. Srutadeva was a fully qualified *brahmana*, and Bahulasva was the king of the dynasty descending from Janaka. Krishna traveled with a number of Rishis - Narada, Vamadeva, Atri, Vyasa, Parasurama, Asita, Aruni, Brihaspati, Kanva, Maitreya, Cyavana and Sukadeva - and journeyed through the kingdoms of Anarta, Dhanva, Kuru-jangala, Kanka, Matsya, Panchala, Kunti, Madhu, Kekaya, Koshala, Arna, blessing the residents and accepting their affectionate offerings. When they reached Mithila, Krishna was welcomed by Srutadeva and Bahulasva, and they both invited him for lunch in their respective homes. So Krishna manifested himself in two identical forms and separately accepted their invitations, and remained with them for several months.

In the meantime, the war was becoming inevitable between the Kurus and the Pandavas. When Balarama heard about the developments, he decided to retire and travel to pilgrimage places, because he did not want to take sides. He first went to Prabhasa (Somanatha) to honor the Devas, the Rishis and the Pitris, then in the company of some *brahmanas* he traveled along the western

branch of the Sarasvati river, visiting the great lake called Bindu sara, Tritakupa, Sudarshana, Vishala, Brahma-tirtha and Chakra-tirtha, then he visited the holy places on the eastern branch of the river. He also went to the various pilgrimage places along the Yamuna and the Ganga and reached the Naimisharanya forest, where many assembled Rishis were performing a great ritual (which is described at the beginning of the *Bhagavata Purana*). All the participants stood up in respect to greet him, except for Romaharshana Suta; Balarama picked up a blade of *kusha* grass and killed Romaharshana by simply touching him, to the great dismay of all the Rishis.

"Your action was against the principles of religion," they said. "We had appointed Romaharshana as the presiding *acharya* for our sacrifice, and you have become guilty of the killing of a *brahmana*. We know that you are God and therefore you are not bound by any rule or scripture, but because you have taken up the role of a human being to accomplish your mission in this world, you should give the good example to human society and accept to undergo the required expiation and purification for your crime."

Balarama accepted the instructions of the Rishis. Romaharshana's son was elected to preside the assembly in the place of his father, and Balarama was asked to redeem himself by killing the *asura* Balvala, son of Ilvala, who lived in that forest and had developed a habit of disrupting the rituals every new moon day, throwing blood, stool, urine, wine and meat into the arena. After that service, Balarama could resume his pilgrimage for another 12 months before considering himself fully purified.

That day was in fact a new moon day, and Balvala's arrival was heralded by a dust storm, a violent and stinking wind. The usual shower of contaminated substances fell on the place of the assembly, and the *asura* himself appeared - black as coal, with glowing red hair and beard, and terrible fangs. Balarama called his

mace and plough and instantly killed the *asura*. Then the Rishis praised his prowess and performed his ritual bathing, just like the Devas had done for Indra after the killing of the *asura* Vritra.

After taking leave from the Rishis, Balarama went to the river Kaushiki and visited the lake from where the Sarayu river starts. Traveling along the course of the Sarayu, he reached Prayaga, and visited the *ashrama* of Pulaha Rishi. Then he went to take bath in the rivers Gomati, Gandaki, Vipasha and Sona. He went to Gaya to offer respects to the ancestors, and to the mouth of the Ganges to take ablutions.

On mount Mahendra he met Parasurama and offered his homage, then he took bath in the seven branches of the river Godavari and also in the rivers Vena, Pampa and Bhimarathi. He met Kartikeya and visited Sri Saila, the abode of Lord Shiva. In the Dravida desa, Balarama visited the sacred Venkata hill (Tirupati), the cities of Kamakoti and Kanchi, the famous river Kaveri and the holy place of Sri Ranga, then mount Rishabha and Madurai, finally reaching Setubandha (Ramesvaram), where he gave 10,000 cows in charity to *brahmanas*. He then visited the rivers Kritamala and Tamraparni and the great Malaya mountain, where he met Agastya Rishi and received his blessings. Finally he reached Kanyakumari, where he had the *darshana* of Mother Durga.

He started on his way back and reached Phalgun tirtha, taking bath in the sacred lake of Panchapsara, where he gave another 10,000 cows in charity. He journeyed through the kingdoms of Kerala and Trigarta, visiting the city of Gokarna, sacred to Shiva and Parvati who lives on the island. He also visited Surparaka and bathed in the rivers Tapi, Payoshni and Nirvindhya, then he entered the Dandaka forest and visited the river Reva near the city of Mahismati. After taking bath in Manu tirtha he returned to Prabhasa, where he heard that the Kurukshetra battle was over and almost everyone was dead - only Bhima and Duryodhana were still

fighting. Balarama wanted to make them stop, but although he was greeted respectfully by the Pandavas, the two opponents continued to fight, impelled by their destiny. Thus Balarama left for Dvaraka, and after a short time he returned to Naimisharanya to the company of the Rishis.

The *Bhagavata Purana* also narrates the episode of the *brahmana* Sudama visiting Krishna in Dvaraka. Sudama was an old friend who had studied in the *gurukula* of Sandipani Muni with Krishna; he was a perfectly qualified *brahmana* and very detached from material gains, but he was so destitute financially that he was unable to maintain his wife properly. One day his wife had suggested him to go and visit his old friend Krishna and ask for his help, and Sudama had accepted the idea because he missed Krishna's company very much. Anxious to bring some present to his old friend, he could only collect a few handfuls of flat rice by begging from the villagers, so he wrapped it up in a cloth and carried it all the way to Dvaraka.

As soon as he saw his old friend approaching, Krishna rushed to welcome him. He affectionately seated him on a nice chair, washed his feet and offered him many pleasant articles, while Krishna's queen Rukmini fanned the guest. The people in the palace were amazed to see Krishna offering such honors to that starving man clothed in dirty rags, and Sudama himself felt extremely embarrassed about the puny gift of flat rice he had to offer. Krishna talked comfortably with Sudama, remembering their days in the *gurukula*, especially one memorable occasion in which they had gone to collect firewood and were stuck in the forest all night, having lost their way because of a strong storm. Finally, Krishna noticed the bundle of flat rice and understanding it was Sudama's loving gift, he snatched it from his hands and happily started to eat the flat rice with great pleasure. Sudama spent the night in Krishna's palace, resting in a beautiful bed after a sumptuous meal,



and in the morning he returned home in great happiness, totally absorbed in his meditation on Krishna, and having totally forgotten about the request of his wife to ask financial help from his old friend. However, when Sudama reached his village, he found that in the place where his humble home had been there was a wonderful palace, surrounded by parks and gardens. A beautiful woman, dressed in valuable clothes and jeweled ornaments and surrounded by many servants, came forward to greet him, and he could recognize his wife. She led him into the palace, showing him around and appreciating all the beautiful things that Krishna's blessing had provided. With the same detachment and transcendental consciousness Sudama accepted his new opulence as a gift from God and lived happily.

Parikshit, who was listening to the *Bhagavata Purana's* narration from Sukadeva, observed that generally the people who want material blessings worship Shiva, while those who worship Krishna tend to be totally detached from material things. Sukadeva observed that Yudhisthira had expressed the same thought in his conversation with Krishna after the completion of the Asvamedha yajna.

Krishna had confirmed, saying that material wealth and position usually constitute a distraction and an obstacle to spiritual realization, because they can make one proud and arrogant. To illustrate the point, Krishna told the story of the *asura* Vrika, who under the suggestion of Narada and after the example of Ravana and Bana, had engaged in fierce austerities in the worship of Shiva. He settled in Kedarnath and started to offer cut pieces from his own body into the sacrificial fire, and finally on the seventh day he decided to offer his own head, too. Concerned, Shiva appeared from the fire restoring his body to full function. "You must stop this foolish actions," Shiva said. "I will give you a boon, but you should not have hurt your body as a form of worship. I am easily

pleased even by a simple offering of water presented by those who take shelter in me."

Vrika wanted power, and a terrible power: he asked Shiva the power to instantly kill anyone just by touching his head. Perplexed, Shiva granted Vrika's wish as he had already promised to do so, but the *asura* decided to test his new power by killing Shiva himself. So Shiva had to take Vishnu's help; Vishnu had already observed the facts and, disguised as a young *brahmachari*, approached the pursuing *asura*. "You seem very tired," Vishnu told Vrika. "What happened to you? Can I help?"

Vrika said he was pursuing Shiva to test his new power of killing people with a mere touch of his hand, and Vishnu had a good laugh. "I wouldn't take Shiva's boon very seriously. You know, Shiva is a funny fellow, often in the company of crazy people, and chances are that his boon does not work at all. See for yourself: just touch your own head and nothing will happen." Confused by the illusory power of Vishnu, the *asura* touched his own head and died on the spot, his head completely shattered as a result of his offenses against Shiva.

Another episode about the playful interactions of the Personalities of God narrates how Bhrigu Rishi was requested by an assembly of Rishis to find out which Personality of God was most magnanimous. Bhrigu went to visit Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu, and put each to increasingly difficult tests. He arrived in the presence of Brahma and did not show the usual respectful protocol of bowing, offering prayers etc. Brahma made an effort to control his anger. Next Bhrigu went to Shiva; Shiva stood up to welcome him affectionately, but Bhrigu rejected him with an offensive attitude. Then Shiva raised his trident in anger, and he was restrained by Devi. Finally Bhrigu went to Vishnu and found him resting, his head in the lap of Lakshmi, and attacked him by kicking his chest. Vishnu stood up immediately and respectfully

greeted the Rishi, asking forgiveness for his neglect and expressing concern for his well being. Vishnu even stated that he had been purified personally by the touch of the sacred feet of the Rishi. Thus his supremely magnanimous character was established.

One day in Dvaraka, king Ugrasena was approached by a *brahmana* whose wife had given birth to a child, but the baby had died immediately. The *brahmana* complained to the king because any disaster in the kingdom is the direct responsibility of the rulers. When a king is virtuous and performs his duties properly, all the subjects live happily without being touched by any disgrace: there is no poverty, no crimes, no shortage of food or untimely deaths.

Again the *brahmana* went to complain to the king about the premature death of his subsequent children, and on one such occasion Arjuna was present. He heard the *brahmana* accusing Krishna, Balarama, Vasudeva, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, who had been unable to save his children, and he took an oath swearing to save their honor, or enter the fire to kill himself. So when the *brahmana's* wife was going to give birth to her tenth child, Arjuna rushed in fully armed, building a complete protection around the house. But as soon as the child was born, it disappeared from sight, to the great sorrow of everyone.

Arjuna chanted a *mantra* to get instantly to Samyamani, Yama's abode, but he was unable to find the child there. He also searched the abodes of Agni, Nirriti, Soma, Vayu and Varuna, until he was joined by Krishna. "I know where the *brahmana's* children are," Krishna said. "Now we will go to rescue them."

Riding in their divine chariot, Arjuna and Krishna traveled through the universe, beyond Saptadvipa, beyond the Lokaloka, and reached outer space. Then Krishna's horses - Saibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Balahaka - stopped in confusion, so Krishna called his Sudarshana chakra to light and show the way. Finally

Krishna and Arjuna arrived at Vaikuntha and met Maha Vishnu. "I took away the *brahmana's* children," he said, "because I was eager to see you both. You are my manifestations, descended to Earth in a mission to protect *dharma*, but you will soon return in me."

Krishna lived in Dvaraka among his relatives and friends for many years. At the end of his mission, he arranged for his dynasty to be removed from Earth, leaving only Vajra, son of Aniruddha, who was son of Pradyumna. Vajra became the father of Pratibahu, father of Subahu, father of Santasena, father of Satasena.

The story of the destruction of the Yadu dynasty and the disappearance of Krishna is also found at the conclusion of *Bhagavata Purana*. As no other force would be able to destroy the Yadus, they would have to kill each other, like a forest is destroyed by a fire created through the friction of dry bamboos.

The final scene of Krishna's mission started when Vasudeva invited many Rishis to his home to perform some auspicious rituals. Narada, Visvamitra, Asita, Kanva, Durvasa, Bhrgu, Angira, Kashyapa, Vamadeva, Atri and Vasistha obliged and completed the ceremonies, then went to the holy place known as Pindaraka.

The youngsters of the Yadu dynasty wanted to have a laugh, so they dressed Samba (the son of Jambavati) as a woman and approached the Rishis to ask them about the future progeny of the lady - would she give birth to sons or daughters. The Rishis could easily see through the deceit, and appropriately assigned a curse: "This person you call a woman will give birth to an iron mace that will destroy your entire dynasty."

To the horror of the youngsters, Samba was soon in pain and a heavy iron mace came out of his body. Terrified, they took the mace to king Ugrasena, who ordered it to be ground to dust and

thrown into the ocean; but the iron dust was washed ashore by the waves and grew into powerful bamboo plants, while the last small piece of iron was swallowed by a fish and later retrieved by a fisherman hunter called Jara, who used it as an arrow point.

Krishna's mission was concluded, so he retired from home and went to the forest to engage in austerities, after taking leave from the Yadu and leaving his last instructions to them. "Our dynasty has been cursed by *brahmanas*, and there nothing that we can do to stop its destruction. You should simply to go Prabhasa kshetra to worship Somanatha Shiva and purify yourselves by bathing in its sacred waters, offering oblations to the Devas and the Pitris, and distributing gifts to *brahmanas*."

Uddhava understood that Krishna was going to leave Dvaraka and followed him; Krishna confirmed that in 7 days the city would be covered by the ocean and only very few would survive the destruction. Then Krishna comforted Uddhava with many spiritual teachings, leaving him a sort of spiritual testament before his disappearance: this part of the *Bhagavata Purana* is known as the *Uddhava gita* and is comparable to the *Bhagavad gita* contained in the *Mahabharata*.

Krishna's teachings to Uddhava begin with the episode of Yadu - the ancient forefather of the Yadu dynasty - meeting a young *avadhuta brahmana* and being instructed by him. The *avadhuta* told Yadu that he had many *gurus*, or spiritual masters - the earth, the mountain, the tree, the air, the sky, the water, the fire, the moon, the sun, the pigeon, the python, the sea, the moth, the bee, the elephant, the honey thief, the deer, the fish, Pingala the prostitute, the *kurara* bird, the child, the young girl, the arrow maker, the snake and the spider.

From earth, he had learned that a sober person is not upset even when facing many difficulties created by other living beings,

because he knows that everything happens under the control of God. From the mountain and from the tree, he had learned to remain fixed in spiritual contemplation without being distracted, and to dedicate all energies to the benefit of others without concerns for one's own advantage.

From air, he had learned to remain always detached from everything, in spite of coming in contact with good and bad qualities in various objects. Like air, the wise lives in various material bodies but never identifies with them. The sky, too, always remain detached and separate from all object - the soul is all-pervading like space and cannot be divided. From water, he had learned to remain always free from all contamination, to be sweet and gentle and produce pleasant sounds. Like water purifies everything, the wise purifies all those who come in touch with him. From fire, he had learned to consume whatever he was offered, and to appear only in the proper circumstances. From the moon, he had learned about cycles in life, about growth and decline, and the eternal existence beyond them. From the sun he had learned that the wise accepts various material objects through his senses and leaves them in time, just as the sun's heat evaporates water and returns it to earth in the form of rain; also like the sun appears reflected in many objects but remains one, the soul may appear in many bodies but always remains one.

He had learned how excessive attachment to family leads to disaster by observing a pigeon who had died trying to rescue his wife and children trapped in a hunter's net. The python had taught him to eat when food was available, and to fast when there was no food. From the sea, he had learned to remain soberly within his own boundaries in spite of all the mighty rivers rushing with a swell after the rainy season, and not to dry during the summer. In the same way, the wise accepts prosperity and deprivation without being distracted from the transcendental awareness.

The moth had shown him that it is dangerous to rush after the promise of sense gratification. The bee had taught him to collect only the small quantity of food needed to survive, without depending on wealthy patrons: when the bee collects more than strictly needed, it accumulates honey, which brings ruin to the hive. Also, like the bee collecting nectar from many flowers, the wise should learn to take the essential meaning from all scriptures and teachings.

From the elephant, he had learned to be wary of physical contact, that creates rivalries among males and a blinding sexual attraction to females. From the honey thief he had learned to take the gifts of family people who have accumulated more wealth than needed. From the deer, he had learned to live freely in the forest, avoiding the material songs that speak of sense gratification. The fish had shown him how one can be caught and killed with the bait of tasty morsels; by fasting all senses are subdued except the tongue, as the desire to taste food becomes stronger.

Pingala was a prostitute who lived in the city of Videha; one evening she sat outside her door hoping for customers, but nobody came to her all night, so in the morning she was completely disappointed with material life and attained the detachment that is required to find true inner happiness. The *kurara* bird is the hawk; when a hawk cannot find food, he will try to snatch it from other birds, so from the *kurara* the *avadhuta* had learned that when some venture becomes too difficult and dangerous, it is better to give it up and save oneself.

From the child, he had learned to remain always innocent and free from concerns, without caring for honor or dishonor. The girl he had observed was sitting alone in her house when a messenger party came with a marriage proposal; she went to the kitchen to prepare some food for the guests, but she did not want to show that the family had no servants, so she removed all bangles but one for

each wrist, to avoid them clashing together and making noise. In the same way, when many people live together there will be too much noise - quarrels, gossip, idle conversation - and so it is better to live alone to get real peace of mind.

The arrow maker was so focused on his work that he did not notice a royal retinue walking past his workshop. The *avadhuta* had also watched the snake living happily in holes made by others, and had learned to be content of whatever housing one can get without giving importance to the desire to build one's house in a special manner. Observing the spider, he had realized how the supreme Lord Vishnu manifests the creation from himself and again withdraws it at the time of the universal destruction - because the spider creates his web, keeps it in good conditions by repairing it, and in the end swallows it again.

After concluding the story of the *avadhuta brahmana* to comfort Uddhava about the imminent disappearance of his spiritual guide, Krishna spoke extensively about the *varna ashrama dharma*, by which a civilized human being can serve God in the form of society.

The system starts in the *gurukula*, the residential school of the *brahmana*, where the children are trained to overcome selfishness and evolve to higher levels of consciousness through the proper performance of one's duties. All students are taught the fundamentals of Vedic knowledge, to rise beyond the identification with the material body and to use one's body in spiritual awareness, in the service of the supreme Soul. The *guru* trains the students in the performance of the traditional religious rituals to connect with the Devas - the personifications of the universal power - without falling into the traps of attachment to heavenly pleasures and development of arrogant pride for one's exalted position.



Krishna spoke at length to Uddhava about the nature of the spiritual *atman*, its fundamental nature of *brahman*, the illusion of material conditioning, and the superficiality of joys and sorrows. A wise person sees his material life as a dream and remains detached from it, whether the body is offended or honored. He then described the characteristics and activities of a self realized saint, the variety of spiritual practices and especially the path of devotion or *bhakti yoga* with all its important details. Besides the formal practice of worship of the Deity and the *sabda brahman*, God can be worshiped in the Sun, in Fire, in the *brahmanas*, in the cows, in those who have realized Vishnu, in Space, in Wind, in Water, in Earth, and in all living beings by honoring and serving them in divine consciousness.

Krishna also discussed about the practice of *astanga yoga*, the study of Sankhya, the principles of virtue and social work, charity, pilgrimages and so on, that help the individual to attain transcendental realization. On the request of Uddhava, Krishna explained the origin of the science of *yoga* and its actual meaning as a method to rise one's consciousness to *sattva* and beyond, engaging in meditation at least three times a day - sunrise, noon and sunset. He told how the four Kumaras had approached Brahma to be instructed about controlling the mind and senses and detach them from the sense objects and meditate on God. At that time the *avatara* Hamsa appeared and spoke at length about *yoga*, starting from the science of Sankhya, to distinguish the *atman* from the material body. The *atman* is part of the universal *brahman*, and one can attain its consciousness as "superconsciousness" by overcoming the limitations of the conditions of wakefulness, dream and deep sleep, that are all illusory and temporary. Sincere devotion enables the constant and powerful meditation on God in deep attachment, forgetting fear and lust, controlling one's body and breathing, and raising the *prana* through the *chakras*.

Hamsa explained about *rechaka*, *kumbhaka* and *puraka*, about the raising of the *kundalini shakti*, first to the heart, meditating on the Sun, the Moon and the Fire, and obtaining the vision of the supreme Soul sitting in the lotus of the heart. He also described the ordinary *yoga siddhis*, such as overcoming thirst and hunger and other bodily problems, seeing distant things in the present past and future, controlling fire as well as water and poisons, moving very fast, taking any form, entering the body of others, reading the minds of others, choosing the time of one's death, seeing the Devas and Apsaras, completing one's projects and giving orders that will be obeyed. The extraordinary *yoga siddhis* are about transforming one's body (making it extremely small, large, heavy or light), materializing objects and controlling the natural laws, including time and space.

Then Krishna told Uddhava about the universal form and how to contemplate God in all beautiful and powerful things, the qualities and activities of the *varnas* (*brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, *sudra*) and *ashramas* (*brahmachari*, *ghrihastha*, *vanaprastha*, *sannyasi*) and the position of those who are outside the civilized society.

Finally he explained again the science of *bhakti* in many details, with all its branches, its regulative principles and practices, as explained to Yudhisthira by Bhishma. He explained about the methods for purification, the practices of *karma kanda*, *upasana kanda* and *jnana kanda*, the process of creation at the adhyatmic, adhidaivic and adhibhautic levels, the metrics of the Vedic hymns, the transmigration of the souls, and the difficulty of maintaining the proper consciousness under all circumstances.

To illustrate the point, Krishna told the story of the *brahmana* from Avanti, who had prosperity but a very bad character. He soon fell from his position, neglecting his duties, his family, and the religious obligations, but remaining very attached to his accumulated wealth. But although he was living as a miser,

denying even the needful to his own body, he gradually lost his possessions as well as his karmic merits and his relationships. His life became unbearable, and he realized that greed and miserliness are only a source of suffering in this life and in the next, and that wealth is subject to a series of contaminating influences, from robbery to intoxication and gambling. Enlightened by his new realizations, he reformed his life and purified himself through the vow of silence, patiently enduring all offenses and mistreatment, and even composed a song about his experience and advanced understanding of the world, highlighting the supreme importance of controlling one's mind and becoming detached from material identification and possession.

Krishna concluded his teachings to Uddhava by explaining about the three modes of material nature (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) and the three methods of Deity worship (vaidic, tantric, and mixed). Finally, he advised Uddhava to go to Badarikashrama, on the Himalayas, to engage in austerities and prepare to leave this world.

After Uddhava's departure, Krishna went for a last time to Dvaraka to give a final speech to the Yadus. He clearly instructed that women and children should move to nearby Sankhodhara, while the men should go to Prabhasa kshetra to engage in austerities and rituals in order to become purified from their offenses.

The Yadus followed Krishna's orders, but after completing the rituals at the temple of Shiva Somanatha they went to break their fast on the beach, and while eating they indulged in drinking rice wine. Confused by intoxication, they started to quarrel with each other, and the fight became more violent. Grabbing the reeds that had grown on the beach from the fatidic iron dust, they killed each other, without listening to Krishna and Balarama who tried to stop them. In the end, only Krishna and Balarama remained. Then Balarama sat on the beach and left this world, and Krishna went to sit under a banyan tree immersed in meditation. The hunter Jara

saw something among the trees and, convinced it was a deer, shot his arrow and hit Krishna's foot; Krishna reassured the horrified hunter that everything had been arranged according to the great plan for the disappearance of the Yadus.

Daruka, Krishna's chariot driver, found Krishna in his last hour, and was instructed to inform the survivors about the events. Vasudeva, Devaki, Rohini, as well as the wives of Krishna and Balarama rushed to Prabhasa but neither Krishna nor Balarama could be found, and they all died too, struck by the pain of separation.

As there were no more adult males left in the Yadu dynasty, Arjuna performed the funeral rites, and took the surviving children with him to Indraprastha, where he anointed Krishna's great-grandson Vajra as the king of the Yadus.