

Mahabharat: The Eternal Conflict

ACT TWO

Scene III

(Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Sanjay, Arjun, Krishna)

DHRITARASHTRA

As from now you are our eyes and ears. Tell me, O Sanjay, as they were assembled, ready and eager for battle, what did my sons and those of Kunti do? After the terrible sound echoed through heaven and the earth, did the war begin immediately?

SANJAY

Oh no, my king, the battle didn't begin yet. Arjun, seated in his chariot driven by Krishna himself, seeing your sons arrayed against him and ready to charge, took up his bow and was about to shoot when he suddenly turned to Krishna and said:

ARJUN

O infallible one, O Krishna, place the chariot in the middle of the battlefield and let me see all these warriors drawn up for battle. Let me see against whom I must fight in this great trial of arms.

KRISHNA

Behold, O brave Arjun, all your enemies assembled here.

ARJUN

But I see only relatives and friends in front of me, O Krishna. Brothers against brothers, grandfather against grandson, teacher against disciple. In Duryodhan's army, I can see grandfather Bhishma, Guru Drona, Kripacharya and other elders, all worthy to be worshipped and not fought.

KRISHNA

Arjun, this is war, and no time to be sentimental. Remember, you are fighting for your right and only performing your duty.

ARJUN

I am overwhelmed with compassion, O Krishna. I cannot raise my arms against my very own people. My limbs are quivering, my mouth is drying up. See, even my Gandiva, gifted to me by the gods, is slipping from my hand.

KRISHNA

That does not become a warrior, O Arjun.

ARJUN

How can I kill my own relatives?

KRISHNA

They will not spare you.

ARJUN

I'd rather they killed me, unresisting.

KRISHNA

Don't be foolish. You'll bring shame on yourself and dishonour and infamy on the Pandavas if you refuse to fight.

ARJUN

Fight whom, Krishna? Kill whom? My own family and kinsmen? What good will come out by destroying them?

KRISHNA

Your duty and destiny is to fight.

ARJUN

To fight for what?

KRISHNA

For your right. If you die in battle you'll attain heaven, and if you win the war, you'll obtain a kingdom on earth.

ARJUN

Gain a kingdom on earth for whom, O Krishna? For these very relatives I am going to kill? Such a kingdom is not worth fighting for, nor do I wish a victory tainted with blood and sin.

KRISHNA

Arjun, I'm telling you once again. You've got to take up your arms and fight for dharma and righteousness. You don't have the right to swerve from your duty.

ARJUN

Is it my duty to kill my own kith and kin? Is not such an act sinful? Doesn't it bring only misfortune? I will not destroy this dynasty even in exchange for heaven.

DHRITARASHTRA

Yes, Arjun, you have taken the right decision. Stick to it, my son. Don't fight. Refuse the lure and lustre of a bloody kingdom.

GANDHARI

Yet I doubt it, Sanjay. Will Arjun really lay down his arms?

DHRITARASHTRA

What is there to doubt? Don't you know that Arjun is a man of his word, righteous and respectful?

GANDHARI

Look, Sanjay, and report further.

DHRITARASHTRA

Don't fight, Arjun. Just leave the battlefield and there'll be no war. Duryodhan will reign in my place.

GANDHARI

And Krishna? What is Krishna doing?

SANJAY

Seeing Arjun casting down his arms and sitting down crestfallen and full of grief, the Lord says:

KRISHNA

Arjun, I beseech you, shake off this degrading unmanliness, this petty weakness of heart. Rise and take up your arms.

ARJUN

I cannot drive away this grief, O Krishna, I cannot.

KRISHNA

Verily I tell you, the wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead.

ARJUN

I don't understand, Krishna. O Lord, instruct me. Reveal to me the enigma of the living and the dead. I surrender myself at your lotus feet. Accept me as your disciple and teach me the mysteries of life and death.

KRISHNA

Then listen. I'll impart to you the secret knowledge of existence. Know Arjun, that never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kinsmen. Nor will we ever cease to exist in the future. Existence is a web woven by four eternities and karma.

ARJUN

Four eternities, Lord?

KRISHNA

Material Nature, the Soul, Time and the Supreme Lord form the four eternities that uphold existence. Material Nature is an eternity in two parts. The inert, motionless matter is inferior nature.

ARJUN

Is that existence without life symptoms?

KRISHNA

Yes. Superior material nature is the body that houses the soul thus forming living entities. This material nature is ever-changing. The body which contains the soul is born and so it is already condemned to death. Verily I tell you, whatever is born must die. The soul then adopts another body. The life span of one body is full of activities, and the next body depends on the activities of the former life. Activity is karma, and activities are under the control of time.

ARJUN

Material nature, both superior and inferior, is eternal. The soul is eternal, time is eternal.....

KRISHNA

Yes, Arjun. Only karma is temporary and one suffers or enjoys according to one's activities. If you want to get out of the cycle of life and death in order to avoid the consequences of your actions, then do your karma, perform your duty without expecting any reward.

ARJUN

I don't understand you, O Lord.

KRISHNA

If you act selflessly, you can free yourself from the bondage of works, and the cycle of birth and death. O Arjun, your right is to work only, to perform your duty. You should not look forward to the fruits of your actions. Renounce the fruits of your actions by devoted service and surrender yourself completely to the Lord. He who gives up all desires, and moves freely from attachment, egoism and thirst for enjoyment, attains peace.

ARJUN

Lord, enlighten me more about the soul.

KRISHNA

The soul is a particle of God. It has its own identity throughout eternity. It is neither born, nor can it die or be destroyed. However, when it takes a material body, it gets entangled in actions according to that body. And when that body ultimately perishes, the soul takes another embodiment. This is called reincarnation.

ARJUN

Reincarnation, my Lord?

KRISHNA

Yes, Arjun, just as you discard your old clothes and wear new ones, so does the soul cast off the old, worn-out, useless bodies, and enters others which are new.

ARJUN

Then these kings, relatives and friends.....

KRISHNA

They are kings, relatives and friends in these bodies which are born. The soul transcends all these. Therefore Arjun, by killing them you are only destroying their perverted material bodies. Verily I tell you, the soul neither kills nor is it killed. All these relatives and friends you see here have sinned, and I have already condemned them to die. Dedicate all your actions to me, and with your mind fixed on me, without desire for gain, and free from egoism, fight.

ARJUN

If I kill them, shall I not incur sin?

KRISHNA

No, you'll only be executing my orders, and so you'll never incur sin.

ARJUN

But killing is violence and violence is evil.

KRISHNA

Violence is evil but violence can also be duty. And when violence is duty, running away from it is evil. Now rise and fight.

ARJUN

I feel a new breath urging me on. Krishna, who are you? Are you the fourth eternity?

KRISHNA

O son of Kunti, you will never come to know me with this body of yours and its limited powers.

DHRITARASHTRA

Why is Krishna saying all this, Sanjay?

GANDHARI

Why must Krishna urge Arjun to fight?

DHRITARASHTRA

Didn't Krishna himself come to Hastinapur to settle for peace?

SANJAY

It's too late for peace now, O King. The Lord means that all the doors leading to peace are now closed.

DHRITARASHTRA

The person to be feared the most in the Pandava army is Krishna. Did Duryodhan make the right choice by preferring Krishna's army to Krishna himself?

GANDHARI

What's done is done. It's too late to reverse the course of time now. Say, Sanjay, what do you see?

ARJUN

Yet tell me about yourself whatever I can grasp, or endow me with such powers that will enable me to perceive your cosmic form. To whom do you manifest yourself, O Lord, who is qualified to attain you?

KRISHNA

Too many questions will confuse you, O son of Kunti. Know that the foolish and unintelligent can never perceive me. After many births and deaths, he who has really gained knowledge surrenders unto me, knowing that I am the cause of all causes and all that is. For him I am no enigma. Arjun, I will grant you the powers to comprehend me. Engage your mind and meditate upon me. Become my devotee, absorb yourself completely in me. Have faith in me and I'll reveal to you what no human eyes have ever beheld.

Fools do deride me, O Arjun,
When I descend in human form.
Behold my mystic opulence,
How I pervade the universe.
I am the source of creation,
I am the energy of life.
I create and annihilate,
I kill, revive and kill again.
All creation derives from me,
All creation resides in me.
I am the whole cosmic order,
I am nature, the soul and time.

ARJUN

I accept all you have told me,
O Krishna, O Supreme Mystic;
My illusions have been dispelled
I'll stand and fight for righteousness.
I want to see that form of yours,
Your cosmic manifestation.

If I perceive that cosmic form
My happiness will know no bounds.
Pray, Master of mystic power
Show me your universal self.

KRISHNA

Your human eyes cannot see me,
Therefore I give you divine eyes;
Behold my universal form
See the past, present and future.
Everything moving and inert
All things are here, all in one place
I am endless, unlimited
And my radiance all expanding.

ARJUN

My dear Lord Krishna, I see assembled in your body all the gods and demigods, all human beings and various other living entities. I see in your body many, many arms, bellies, mouths, eyes, scattered everywhere, without limit. I see in you no beginning, no middle, no end.

KRISHNA

See how I spread throughout the skies
See how I pervade the cosmos.
I am the beginning of all,
The energy that creates all.
I am that which sustains all life,
Creation is my energy.
I am life and I am death too,
The beginning, middle and end.

ARJUN

O Krishna, you bewilder me.

KRISHNA

I am the supreme Lord of all,
I am in all, all are in me.
As rivers merge in the ocean
All these warriors will come to me.
I have already killed them all,
You are only my instrument.
Therefore kill and be not disturbed.
Now get up, fight and win glory.