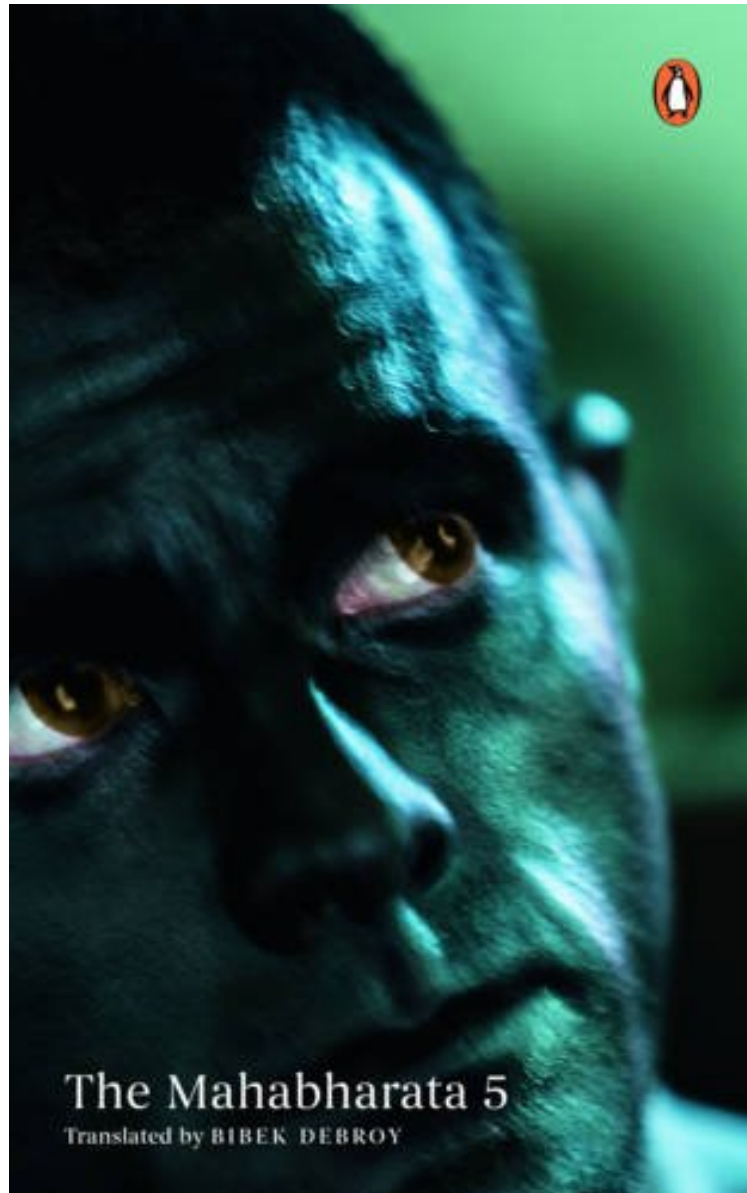


[Free pdf] The Mahabharata (Volume 5)

The Mahabharata (Volume 5)

Bibek Debroy (Trans.)
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Bibek Debroy (Trans.) : The Mahabharata (Volume 5) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mahabharata (Volume 5):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Item as expected By Rebecca Schall Item as expected 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Amba and Shikhandi, and Bhishma - A Chapter, Begun in the Court of the King

of Kashi, Will End on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra By Abhinav Agarwal (edited Nov 05, 2012) First off, let's go over what the fifth volume of the unabridged translation of the Mahabharata by Bibek Debroy covers. It contains sub-parvas sixty through sixty-six. It completes the Udyoga Parva (fifth Parva) with the "Amba Upakhyaana" (or "Ambopakhyaana") sub-Parva (60th sub-Parva). It contains the entire "Bhishma" Parva (sixth parva), which in turn contains the "Jambukhanda-Vinirmana", "Bhumi", "Bhagavad Gita", and "Bhishma Vadha" sub-Parvas. Volume 5 begins the "Drona" Parva (seventh parva), and within it contains the "Dronabhisheka" and "Samshaptaka-vadha" Parvas (sixty-fifth and sixty-sixth sub-parvas, respectively). This volume therefore covers the first 10 days of the Mahabharata war on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The only major warrior to fall in the first ten days is Bhishma. Fittingly enough, the volume begins with the story of Amba, the eldest daughter of the king of Kashi, and how she was reborn as Shikhandi, and how she turned into a man, permanently. The word 'permanently' is pertinent, as I will explain. Amba, reborn as Shikhandi, was responsible for Bhishma's death on the battlefield. There are two tales, a sermon, and ten days of war described in this volume. And oh yes, more death and gore than you can count. Once the battle has begun, I was treated, in a manner of speaking, to some gory descriptions of the carnage wrought by the war and by warriors like Bhima. Some of the passages however became repetitive, and after some time I found it difficult to distinguish one day's battle from the other. The descriptions of the days' battles take up a bulk of the book, and each day's battle is described in two-three chapters. While there is no hard and fast rule followed, you will however find that one chapter describes the beginning of the day and the battle, while a second chapter will describe the battle till afternoon, while the third chapter will take us through the end of the day's battle. There are descriptions of vyuhās designed by the commanders of the Kuru and Pandava armies, but what significance they have on the outcome of that day's battle is also not clear. We know that the chakra vyuha on the thirteenth day will prove to be fatal to Abhimanyu, but that's only on one day. Let us look at the two principal stories that are described on the eve of the war, in the "Amba Upakhyaana" (or "Ambopakhyaana") sub-parva. As I had written, Vol. 4 ended on the tantalizing note of Bhishma about to begin why he would not attack or kill Shikhandi. Before we can hear Shikhandi's story, we need to know Amba's tragic story. The only reason why Amba, the eldest daughter of the King of Kashi, was rejected by Shalva seems to be ego. Shalva could not bear to see the woman he loved be carried off by another, even as he felt himself powerless to fight the mighty Bhishma. The short of it is that Bhishma had gone to the king of Kashi, where the king's three daughters were being offered for marriage as "virya-shulka" (and not in a swaymvar, as is mistakenly thought; the concept of virya-shulka itself is less than wholesome to my mind), put them on his chariot, defeated the gathered princes and kings, and brought them to Hastinapur for marriage to his step-brother Vichitravirya, son of Satyawati. Amba however wanted to marry Shalva, and Bhishma agreed, sending her to Shalva, accompanied by maids and brahmanas. Shalva however was an angry, defeated, petulant, and frustrated man. He took out his frustration on Amba, and refused to marry her. "You were won by Bhishma and seemed to be delighted then." No amount of persuading or pleading by Amba worked, and Shalva abandoned Amba, "the way a snake discards its old skin." He did however, at the end of Chapter 835, admit the reason behind his rejection - "I am frightened of Bhishma. You are Bhishma's property." That is neither a chivalrous nor a very decent attitude to take. Nonetheless, it is what he did, and Amba was all alone and confused. In frustration, she blamed Bhishma, her father ("whose intelligence is foolish"), herself, Shalva, and even the creator. She was then advised by brahmanas against staying on in the forest ("On seeing you alone in this deserted and dense forest, kings will solicit you"), and nor did she want to back to her father ("I will be disrespected by my relatives"). Eventually, a learned brahmana, Hotravahana, advised her to go see the great Parashurama. After listening to Amba, Akritavrana, Parashurama's follower, asked her to clarify what she wanted of Parashurama - Shalva to be asked to take her back, or Bhishma to be vanquished. One course of action would have been to right a wrong, the other to avenge a wrong. Parashurama was reluctant to take up arms, saying, "But I cannot take up weapons in any way, unless I am instructed to do so by brahmanas. That is my resolution." Amba and Akritavrana argued back and forth with Rama (Parashurama). Finally, Parashurama agreed, but not to do outright battle against Bhishma if it could be avoided. He wanted to first try and persuade Bhishma, but was also clear that should Bhishma not agree to his request, he would slay Bhishma - "... I will kill that insolent person. The arrows that I unleash do not remain in bodies." Irresistible force. Bhishma was in a dilemma because Parashurama had also been his teacher, his guru, "... you yourself taught me the four kinds of weapons." The four kinds of weapons, Bibek Debroy, the translator, tells us are "mukta", "amukta", "mukta-amukta", and "yantra-mukta" (it's quite an intelligent taxonomy when you read about it in the footnote). A guru therefore cannot be killed. "... I cannot kill a preceptor in battle, especially one who is a brahmana..." Bhishma however also had to face the reality that Parashurama was promising to vanquish him in battle. His kshatriya dharma was clear. "If one sees a brahmana with an upraised weapon ... dharma is clear that no sin is committed from killing a brahmana." And he was also quite self-assured, some may say arrogant, about his prowess. "You have often boasted in assemblies that you have exterminated kshatriyas from the world. But listen to my words. At that time, Bhishma had not been born and there were no kshatriyas like me." Immovable object. After several days of fierce battle between the two, Bhishma one night prayed that he may find a way to defeat Parashurama. Early in the morning brahmanas come to him in his sleep and advise him to use the "Prajapatya" weapon, also known as "prasvapan", created by Vishwakarma, and which could put anyone to sleep. Note that a

similar weapon, by a different name, was used by Arjuna against the Kurus during the Go-Harana episode. The next day, as Bhishma got ready and aimed that weapon at Parashurama, the celestial sage Narada appeared before him and advised him not to discharge the prasvapan weapon. Bhishma acceded, and accordingly withdrew the weapon. Parashurama considered that to be his defeat, since, Bibek Debroy, the translator, writes in a footnote, "Bhishma had voluntarily withdrawn the weapon and in a way, Parashurama had been defeated." Left without any possibility of anyone defeating Bhishma now, since even the mighty Parashurama had failed, Amba performed terrible austerities for twelve years, and finally Shiva appeared before her. He told her that she would be born as "a maharatha in Drupada's lineage." Upon hearing this, Amba could wait no longer, and made "an extremely large funeral pyre and set fire to it." The text brings out very vividly the terrible nature of the hatred that Amba harboured against Bhishma - "When the fire was blazing, with rage igniting her senses, she said, "This is for Bhishma's destruction." and "entered the fire." The fire of vengeance that had been burning inside Amba for more than a decade now culminated in literally consuming her. And thus ended one chapter.

ShikhandiThe tale of Shikhandi is an equally painful one, though not one with such a fiery end. Shikhandi was Amba, reborn as Drupada's daughter. Why Drupada wanted a son who would kill Bhishma is not clear. Perhaps, as some translations have suggested, he wanted to wreak vengeance not only on Drona, but also on Bhishma. After all, it was Bhishma, the patriarch of the Kurus, who had appointed Drona as the guru of the Kuru princes, and therefore could have been seen by Drupada as also culpable. It is another matter that all three of Drupada's children, Shikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna, and Draupadi, end up living fairly tragic lives. Lord Shiva, also known as "Shambhu", granted the boon of a son to Drupada, but not in a straightforward way. Why Lord Shiva chose the circuitous way of granting Drupada's wish is not clear. He told Drupada that he would have a daughter who would later turn into a man. After a daughter was born to Drupada's queen, Drupada had it proclaimed that "A son has been born to me." and also "... concealed the facts and had all the rites performed for a son, as if he had a son." Perhaps Drupada had hoped that the daughter would turn into a man shortly after birth. That did not happen, and the girl came of age. Drupada decided to get her married, to a woman - such was the desperation of the man - the daughter of the lord of Dasharna. One wonders just how did Drupada think the fact of Shikhandi's gender would remain hidden, especially after her marriage! And find out the truth did her wife. One can imagine the anger of King Hiranyavarma at this terrible deception. He promised to "kill King Drupada, together with Shikhandi." It is perhaps fitting that the Mahabharata allude to Drupada's character in this episode, when it says, "King Drupada was timid by nature. In addition, the lord of men was guilty." Guilty of deception. He approached his queen for help, who sought somewhat to take the blame upon herself. When Shikhandi learned of these troubles his parents were facing, she "was overcome with grief" and "made up her mind to kill herself" and left the capital of Panchala (now modern day Aligarh) for a "deep and deserted forest." There a yaksha named Sthunakarna took pity on her, and in a most extraordinary act of generosity, offered this exchange - "For a limited period of time, I will give you my male organ. But I tell you truthfully that when the time is over, you must return to me. ... I will bear your female organs." Shikhandi agreed - "When King Hemavarma has returned to Dasharna, I will become a maiden again and you will become a man." And thus was Shikhandi able to help out his father and also pacify his father-in-law. This exchange, however, was temporary, right? Did it become permanent? Yes. It did. It so happened that one day Kubera, the god of wealth, came by Sthuna's residence. Kubera was incensed on hearing what had happened, and cursed Sthuna, "... you have committed an act that has never been done before. Therefore, from now on, you will be a woman and not a man." The only concession he offered was that "When Shikhandi has been killed in battle, the yaksha Sthuna will regain his old form." And so it came to pass that Bhishma told Duryodhana why he would "not shoot arrows at a woman, one who had earlier been a woman, one who has the name of a woman and one who has the form of a woman." Duryodhana then asked Bhishma and others how much time they would need to destroy the Pandava army. Bhishma and Drona both estimated one month, while Kripa estimated it would take him two months. Ashwatthama estimated ten nights, while Karna thought he could decimate the Pandava army in only five nights. This elicited a scornful retort from Bhishma, "You are capable of saying a lot and saying anything that you want." Thus ends Udyoga Parva. And begins Bhishma Parva. Bhishma Parva is notable for three reasons. The first is that the proper war at Kurukshetra begins in this parva. Second, Krishna's sermon to Arjuna, Bhagvada Gita, is contained in this parva. Thirdly, this is the first parva where descriptions of war are described in the most gruesome of terms. There is a hint of the terrible effects of war in the Khandava-dahana parva, but this parva excises none of the horrors of war. The parva begins with the warring sides agreeing to the rules of the war. By the time the eighteen days ended, every single rule would end up being broken, either by the Pandavas or the Kauravas. Some accuse the Pandavas of being the first to break the rules of war, by fielding the once-woman Shikhandi against Bhishma, while others accuse the Kauravas of breaking the rules of war, when seven warriors ganged up on the lone Abhimanyu. "Those who engaged in a war of words would be countered with words. Those who had withdrawn from the midst of battle would should not be killed under any circumstances. ... Any striking should be in accordance with appropriateness, valor, energy and age and after issuing a challenge had been issued. It should not be against one who was unsuspecting or distressed, or was engaged in fighting with another, or was distracted and retreating." [Jambukhandi-Vinirmana Parva] Sage Vyasa offered divine sight to Dhritarashtra so he may witness the battle, but the King refused. Sanjaya instead was bestowed with the divine sight.

The sage delivered some plain talking to the blind king, Dhritarashtra - "Death himself has been born in the form of your son" alluding to Duryodhana. There are several shlokas that follow that describe the island of Sudarshana, which seem out of place in the narrative, and are also "... difficult to understand" as Bibek Debroy notes. Similarly, Bhumi Parva seems incongruous, and can be skipped over without losing context. The Bhagavad Gita Parva (sixty-third sub-parva, and the third parva in the Bhishma Parva) does not begin with one of the most recognizable shlokas of all, "dharmakshetrey kurukshetrey, samaveta yuyutsavah... ." Instead, we are told that Sanjaya rushed from the battlefield to Dhritarashtra to inform him that Bhishma had fallen in battle. We can therefore surmise that this would have been on the night of the tenth day, or perhaps on the morning of the eleventh day of battle. Or maybe not, because Sanjaya goes on to mention the end of Drona later on, as he starts to recount the eleventh day of battle. It is not clear, at least to me, at this point, when exactly Sanjaya returned to Hastinapur. Dhritarashtra is shocked and grief-stricken, and wants to know about the battle. Thus begins Sanjaya's description of the battle. In chapter 877 we get to read about the standards of some of the warriors in the battle. Bhishma's, for instance, had "a large palm tree with five stars", while Drona's "had a golden altar ... adorned with a water pot and the sign of a bow". Duryodhana "had a bejewelled elephant", while Jayadratha had "a beautiful silver standard, marked with the sign of a boar." It is chapter 883 that sees the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita, with these words, "Dhritarashtra asked, "O Sanjay! Having gathered on the holy plains of Kurukshetra, wanting to fight, what did my son and sons of Pandu do?" I will leave out the Gita from this review, except to draw attention to a couple of points. The first is that the Gita translation in this volume is more than a translation. While Bibek Debroy adds footnotes on several pages in the translation, sometimes to clarify, sometimes to add an explanatory note, or sometimes to point out an inconsistency or perhaps error in the Critical Edition, these are relatively sparse. In the Gita however, the footnotes are copious. There are pages where the footnotes take up more space than the translation itself. To call these chapters a translation would be incomplete. I would rather describe them more as an "annotated translation". The second point is that it is not a straightforward case of an annotated translation either. There are several footnotes where Bibek Debroy makes us aware of, or draws attention to, the fact that while the Gita itself may be the spoken words of the Lord, they do have a subtext, a context, to them that we should be aware of. For instance, one footnote, #157 to be precise, notes, "The expression without finding fault is significant. There must therefore have been opposition to this view or teaching. For instance, there was the school of sannyasa or renunciation, which advocated the giving up of all action." In some ways, Vol. 5 can be read only for this annotated translation of the Gita. After the Bhagavad Gita parva begins the Bhishma Vadha sub-parva. This is a long parva, and describes the first ten days of the battle. It contains close to 4000 shlokas. While this parva has vivid and detailed descriptions of the battle, brutally frank at times, especially when describing the mayhem that takes place, these descriptions are also sometimes repetitive. It is somewhat difficult to get an estimate of the relative strengths of the two armies as the days progressed. We are however told of which army had the better measure of the other at the end of each day, with some exceptions. Before the proper war could begin, Yudhishtira "removed his armour and cast aside his supreme weapons" and proceeded on foot towards the Kaurava army, which brought cries of alarm from his brothers and the Pandava camp, and shouts of derision from the Kaurava army. Yudhishtira however was seeking blessings from his elders, and more importantly, and cunningly perhaps? asking some key questions. "We are inviting you to fight with us. O father! Grant us the permission. Give us the blessings." Bhishma's anguish at having to fight on the side of the Kaurava army was evident as he lamented, "The Kouravyas have robbed me through wealth." The question that Yudhishtira asked Bhishma was, "How can an enemy kill you in battle", while he asked Drona, "How can we vanquish you in battle?" Bhishma was not in the mood to oblige, just yet, and he brushed off Yudhishtira, saying "I do not see anyone who can defeat me in battle. The time for my death has not arrived. Come to me again later." Drona was more helpful, "As long as I am fighting in battle, you cannot be victorious. ... Except when I am ready for death and have withdrawn myself from weapons and my senses, no warrior can kill me in battle." Vol. 6 will reveal the details of how an elephant came to be killed, how Dharmaraja came to utter a lie, temporarily discarded his dharma, and how the guru came to lay down his weapons. Krishna once again appealed to Karna, Radheya, "Until Bhishma has been killed, come over to our side. O Radheya! If you perceive both sides to be equal, after Bhishma has been killed, go fight again and help Dhritarashtra's son." Krishna perhaps perceived that Karna would be burning up at the thought of not taking part in the battle. The prospect of fighting alongside Arjuna would have been too much for Karna however. Karna was anyway not a mercenary of sorts that he would have cared for fighting for the sake of fighting. Karna anyway, as we all know, refused. As the fighting begins, so do the killings. As the killings happen, accounts of sufferings also arise. As you read this parva, it also disabuses you of any notion of war as an antiseptic, sanitized affair, settled with the discharge of celestial weapons fired from afar that bring down soldiers from either army. No. The gore and horrors of war are brought in such vivid terms that it would be a rare soul who will read these chapters and not feel revolted by war. To that extent the war comes off as a terrible price to pay for peace, as it should. "Driven by the desire to kill, the warriors could not distinguish between their own and those of the enemy. ... the men called loudly for their relatives, their sons, fathers, brothers and kin, their maternal uncles and nephews. In that field of battle, some others called for others. ... Their thighs were broken and their hands and arms torn apart. Their sides were shattered. Some were still alive and could be screaming from thirst. ... With the heads sliced off, some supreme among

men still stood, with their bows raised and holding weapons."Arjuna, when not fighting Bhishma, is a terrible sight to behold, and the destruction he wreaks is terrifying."Kiriti made an extremely terrible river flow on the field of battle. The blood was the bodies of men wounded by weapons. The foam was human fat. Its expanse was broad and it flowed swiftly. The banks were formed by the dead bodies of elephants and horses. The mud was the entrails, marrow and flesh of men. ... The moss was formed by heads, with their hair attached. ... The bones of men, horses and elephants were the stones. A large number of crows, jackals, vultures and herons and many predatory beasts like hyenas were seen to line up along its banks."Dhritarashtra, as he listened to the account of the battle from Sanjaya, sometimes despaired, sometimes accused Sanjay of being partial in his account of the battle. Either way, he remained stubbornly steadfast in refusing to accept the karmic cause of this terrible battle. He is, in some ways, the antithesis of Krishna. "It is my view that destiny is superior to human endeavour" - he repeats often."You always tell me that the Pandavas are not being killed and are happy. O Sanjaya! You tell me that those on my side are devoid of manliness and have fallen down, or are falling down, or are being killed. ... I do not see any means whereby the Pandvas may decay and those on my side are able to obtain victory in this battle."Such a preparation on earth has never been seen before, by men, or by the immensely fortunate and ancient rishis. ... It they should be killed in battle, how can that be anything other than destiny?"Sanjay, on his part, kept reminding his king as to where the blame truly lay, and that fate was not to be blamed for this massacre. "Nothing was accomplished because of mantras and nothing was caused by maya." "It is because of your own sins that you have confronted this calamity."Yudhishtira is Dharmaraja, but as I read Vol. 5, yet the sight of reversals gets him ruffled. He wants victory, but doesn't seem to trust Arjuna to have the heart to do what is required to achieve it. A conflicted soul.After the end of battle on the first day, where Bhishma had had the better of the Pandava army, Yudhishtira lamented to Krishna, "He consumes my soldiers with his arrows, like a fire consumes dry grass. How can we possibly glance at the great-souled one? He is licking up my soldiers, like a fire fed with oblations. ... Without a boat, I am immersed in the fathomless waters of Bhishma."And then, he vented some frustration at Arjuna also. "I see Savyasachi stationed in battle, as if he was a neutral spectator. Bhima alone remembers the dharma of kshatriyas." These were strong words from the eldest Pandava. It is not as if Yudhishtira was over-optimistic of their chances of victory either. Before the fighting began, he had been "overcome with grief" upon seeing the massive Kaurava army, to which Arjuna had replied and consoled his brother, "I do not see any reason for despondency. You have the lord of the universe and the lord of the thirty gods and because of this, you are assured of victory." At the end of the ninth day, when it was clear that Bhishma would soon destroy the entire Pandava army if left unchecked, Yudhishtira again lamented, and asked Krishna, "... tell me what I should do. O Keshava! But this should be without contravening my own dharma. ... O Madhava! As you had promised, help us, but without taking part in the fight."Arjuna's heart seemed to be less than fully committed to the battle, as Yudhishtira had observed. Though he fought, he was less than effective against his grandsire, Bhishma. On Day 3, Bhishma had been in devastating form, and there was chaos in the Pandava army. Despite Krishna's exhortations to fight, Arjuna was "mild". "Krishna witnessed Bhishma's valour in the battle and saw the mildness with which the mighty-armed Arjuna countered him. ... Bhishma was killing the best of the best among the soldiers of Pandu's son. Bhishma was like the fire of destruction amidst Yudhishtira's army. The lord Keshava, the destroyer of enemy heroes, could not longer tolerate this."Krishna decides to take matters into his own hands, literally. "I will kill Bhishma and his followers and Drona. ... I will kill all the sons of Dhritarashtra... Vasudeva's son discarded the reins of the chariot and raised the chakra in his hand." Though Bhishma welcomed the lord, Arjuna tried to restrain Krishna. Such was Krishna's strength and anger, that "Vishnu dragged Jishnu after him with great force. ... Partha forcibly grasped him by the feet. O king! Thus grasping him with force, Kirit succeeded in stopping him at the tenth step." It is interesting that this show of anger from Krishna did not have its effect on Arjuna for long. On the ninth day, less than a week later, the same drama repeated itself, in almost identical fashion.Bhima alone was the warrior who approached this war with a clear mind, free from doubt and confusion. He set about methodically destroying the Kaurava army."He killed some with his legs. He brought down others and pressed them down. He beheaded some with his sword and frightened others with his roars. The force of his thighs brought others down on the ground. Others fled on seeing him, dying out of terror. ...We saw dead elephants strewn along whichever path Bhimasena took, like mountains. ...His body was smeared with fat, blood, lard and marrow. Vrikodara whirled his club, drenched with the blood of elephants. He seemed to be as terrible as Pinaki, the wielder of Pinaka."On Day 6, Bhima, leaving his charioteer Vishoka behind, "descended from his chariot and grasped a club. With this, he began to kill the soldiers of the sons of Dhritarashtra, which was like a great ocean." In some ways, I am more inclined to think of Bhima as the true karmayogi in the battle.Duryodhana is dismayed that his eleven akshaunis and the mighty warriors in his army were unable to get the better of the smaller Pandava army. He coaxed, chided, and remonstrated with the commander of the army, Bhishma, almost every single day of the battle.On the night of the eighth day of battle however, Duryodhana could take it no longer. He consulted Karna, Shakuni, and Duhshasana. Karna suggested that "Let Bhishma, Shantanu's son, withdraw from this great battle. ... I will kill the Parthas." Bhishma was naturally pained at this suggestion, and "Overcome with grief and anger, he thought for a long time." Bhishma resolved to "kill all the assembled Somakas and the Panchalas", except Shikhandi. Duryodhana asks his brother to make sure that Bhishma was adequately protected from Shikhandi,

lest "Shikhandi not be like a wolf that kills a tiger." On the night of the ninth day, Yudhishtira and others approached Bhishma, who himself told them the way to remove him from battle. Now that it had been decided that the tenth day of battle would see Shikhandi fight in front of Arjuna, and that the decisive battle with Bhishma would take place, Arjuna "was tormented by grief" He asked Vasudeva, "As a child, I used to play with the great-minded one. .. I used to sully the great-souled one's garments with the dust on my body, when I used to climb onto his lap as a child." A heartbreaking moment for Arjuna. On the tenth day, as Shikhandi advanced towards Bhishma, and showered him with arrows, Bhishma did not retaliate. "Gangeya glanced at Shikhandi with anger blazing in his eyes. ... He seemed to burn him down the look in his eyes." Despite all the fighting, it was only towards the end of the tenth day of battle that Bhishma finally fell, not to Shikhandi, but to Arjuna's arrows. He spoke to Duhshasana, "They have been shot in a continuous stream. These cannot be Shikhandi's arrows. They have penetrated my firm armour and have mangled my inner organs. They have struck me with the force of clubs. These cannot be Shikhandi's arrows. ... These are Arjuna's arrows. These cannot be Shikhandi's arrows." On the night of the tenth day, there was a stream of visitors to the fallen Bhishma. One of them was Karna. Bhishma told Karna of his parentage, "You are a Kounteya. You are not a Radheya. I have known this from Narada and from Krishna Dvaipayana and Keshava. ... I have spoken harsh words towards you for the sake of reducing your energy. It is my view that you hated the Pandavas without any reason." How did Dhritarashtra react to this stunning piece of news. Remember that this is Sanjaya's account of the battle to Dhritarashtra. Surely the blind king could not have been but affected by this news. One of the three pillars of Duryodhana, along with Duhshasana and Shakuni, Karna was the trunk of the tree that was Duryodhana. What did Dhritarashtra think of this event? We never do learn of Dhritarashtra's reaction. Drona took over as the commander of the Kaurava army after Bhishma fell. Karna also joined the Kaurava army. And the battle continued. Disclosure: I received this fifth volume of the Mahabharata translation ex-gratis from Penguin Publishers India, due in no small part to the translator, Dr. Bibek Debroy, who read my reviews and was kind enough to appreciate them.

This definitive and magnificent 10-volume unabridged translation is one of the rare English translations in full of the epic. Bibek Debroy makes the Mahabharata marvellously accessible to contemporary readers. Dispute over land and kingdom may lie at the heart of this story of war between cousins the Pandavas and the Kouravas but the Mahabharata is about conflicts of dharma. These conflicts are immense and various, singular and commonplace. Throughout the epic, characters face them with no clear indications of what is right and what is wrong; there are no absolute answers. Thus every possible human emotion features in the Mahabharata, the reason the epic continues to hold sway over our imagination. In this superb and widely acclaimed translation of the complete Mahabharata, Bibek Debroy takes on a great journey with incredible ease.

About the Author Bibek Debroy is a member of Niti Aayog. He is an economist who has published popular articles, papers and books on economics. He also writes on Indology and Sanskrit. Penguin published *Sarama and Her Children: The Dog in Indian Myth* in 2008 and his translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* in 2006. Bibek Debroy was awarded the Padma Shri in 2015.