

[E-BOOK] The Mahabharata (Volume 7)

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Bibek Debroy (Trans.)

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Bibek Debroy (Trans.) : The Mahabharata (Volume 7) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mahabharata (Volume 7):

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Weapons kill, but words will hurt much, much before thatBy Abhinav AgarwalShort review: This seventh volume sees the war come to an end, with the fulfillment of vows, the

killing of family, the drinking of blood, and the breaking of thighs. The Pandavas have won this terrible war, but the final price they would have paid for this victory will be known only in the eighth volume. Long review: In some sense, the story of the Mahabharata is a tale of words. Ask anyone to identify that one pivotal episode in the epic that set in stone the inevitability of the war and they will point to Droupadi's insult after the game of dice in Hastinapur (Dyuta Parva, Sabha Parva, Vol. 2), where she was derided as a "courtesan" by Karna. What was the trigger for Droupadi to be so demeaned? Most will agree it was the barb Droupadi hurled at Suyodhana in the fabled palace at Indraprastha (even though the particular line in question has been excised from the Critical Edition). And with what final words did Dhritarashtra send his emissary, Sanjaya, to Upalavya to negotiate peace with his nephews, the Pandavas? "At the right time, whatever you think should be said for the welfare of the Bharatas, say that in the midst of the kings, but do not say anything that incites them to the war." [Sanjaya-yana Parva, Udyoga Parva, Ch 22, Vol. 4]. Before the war began, an arrogant Duryodhana, convinced of his military superiority, sent Uluka, Shakuni's son, with a message for the Pandavas, and Bhima in particular, "O Uluka! On my behalf, speak these words to the foolish, ignorant, and glutton eunuch Bhimasena. "Vrikodara! Though impotent, you took an oath in the middle of the assembly hall." "If words can incite war, words can also avert war and bloodshed. This becomes clear when an irritated and injured Yudhishtira let loose a volley of insults at Arjuna (Karna-vadha Parva, Ch 48, Vol. 7), who then vowed to kill Yudhishtira (Ch 49). Krishna stepped in, pacified the two, and suggested a compromise - Arjuna should offer a "trifling insult" to his elder brother, and address him as "tvam" - since insulting one's elder is like killing him. Arjuna did so, but was - yet again - so filled with remorse at having insulted his brother that he wanted to kill himself. Krishna, yet again, suggested the non-violent way out; Arjuna should praise himself - "Tell him about your own qualities now. Thereby, you will kill yourself today." (Dr. Debroy's footnote - "Because self-praise is like killing one's own self.") This saga of words finds its apogee, or nadir - depending on your point of view, in the seventh volume of Bibek Debroy's ongoing translation of the unabridged Mahabharata (based on the Critical Edition by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute). While most people with a basic familiarity with the Mahabharata will know that Arjuna killed Karna as the latter tried to extricate his chariot stuck in mud, few will know that Karna's charioteer was Shalya, the maternal uncle of the younger Pandavas - Nakula and Sahadeva. Fewer still will know the story of how Shalya was tricked by Duryodhana into fighting on the side of the Kauravas (Ch 8, Udyoga Parva, Vol. 4). And very few will know that Shalya had then been recruited by the Pandavas to psychologically weaken Karna (Ch 8, Udyoga Parva, Vol. 4) in the war. It comes as little surprise therefore when you read, for an agonizingly thirty long pages (I estimate five hundred shlokas), Karna and Shalya bicker and trade barbs and insults, even as they are ready to head out for war on the morning of the seventeenth day of battle. Neither warrior is willing to cede ground, and neither warrior is quite ready to settle this with his weapons. Shalya is determined to undermine Karna's confidence. Sample these pearls of wisdom exchanged between the warriors: "Arjuna is like a cloud among men and you are croaking back at him, life a frog. From its own house, a dog barks at a tiger that is roaming in the forest." [Shalya to Karna, Ch 27, Karna Parva] "There is no doubt that you have subsisted on leftovers from the sons of Dhritarashtra." [Shalya to Karna, Ch 28, Karna Parva] The squabble between the two degenerates into name calling and worse, as when Karna tells Shalya, "You are certain to know this. But I will tell you more" and proceeds to tell Shalya that he (Shalya) comes from a region - Madra, whose people eat from vessels "which have been licked by dogs", and that the "women of Madra are the filth among women", to which Shalya retorts, "Abandoning of the distressed and the sale of wives and sons is prevalent among those from Anga. You are the lord of that region." You get the general drift of the conversation between two warriors. The account of the eighteen-day war has taken up almost three volumes of this translation (starting with the Bhishma-vadha parva in Vol. 5, all of Vol. 6, and all of Vol. 7) - more than one thousand three hundred pages, and more than sixteen thousand shlokas (starting with Bhishma-vadha parva, the entire Drona Parva, the entire Karna Parva, and all or part of Shalya Parva, depending on where you treat the end of the war to be). This has been long, and in some ways tedious because accounts of the battles in this war become indistinguishable from one another. As is quite possibly the case with other parts of the epic, the account of the eighteen day war also saw substantial additions in the first thousand years or so since its writing, and what may have been no more than a couple of thousand shlokas of the war in the beginning grew into more than sixteen thousand shlokas. The volume ends with Bhima defeating and crushing Duryodhana's thighs (Gada Yuddha Parva). The war is over. The carnage will take one more night to die down. That will form the initial part of the eighth volume, due in November 2013. The translator, Dr. Bibek Debroy, has soldiered on for more than three years now with this translation - two volumes coming out each year since 2010, and the end now appears in sight. While there are both free and contemporary unabridged translations available, what makes this stand out is the clear, modern-day English that doesn't resort to archaic usages like "thou" and "hast", the fidelity to the Critical Edition, the almost encyclopedic knowledge of Dr Debroy that is put to use to clarify and provide insights into terms and phrases, and at times even correct the Critical Edition, make this my recommendation for those looking for an English translation of the unabridged Mahabharata to dig their teeth into. Note: This seventh volume, translated by Bibek Debroy, contains the entire Karna Parva and Shalya Parva, the eighth and ninth Parvas respectively in the 18-parva classification of the Mahabharata. As per the 100 Parva classification, this volume contains parvas 73 through 77 - Karna-vadha Parva, Shalya-vadha Parva, Hrada-pravesha

Parva, Tirtha Yatra parva, and Gadha yuddha Parva. The 560 pages of this volume (not counting the Introduction and Foreword) cover the 7,185 shlokas of these parvas. Disclosure: I received a copy of volume 7 courtesy Dr. Debroy and Penguin India.

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.