

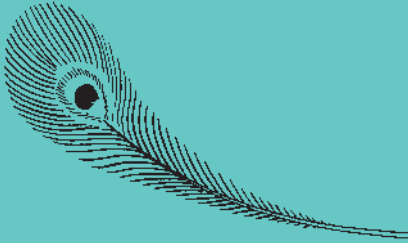
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Maha·bhárata

Book Six

Bhishma

Volume Two



Translated by  
**ALEX CHERNIAK**

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS & JJC FOUNDATION

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# MAHĀBHĀRATA

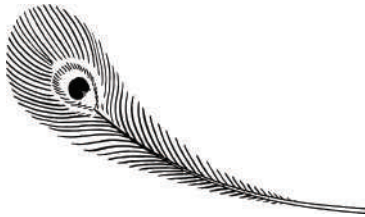
BOOK SIX

BHĪṢMA

VOLUME TWO

TRANSLATED BY

Alex Cherniak



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2009

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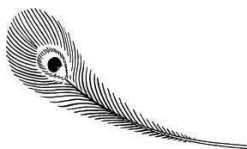
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97–98

THE KÁURAVAS' CONSULTATIONS

SAÑJAYA uvāca:

- 97.1 TATO DURYODHANO rājā, Śakuniś c' āpi Saubalaḥ,  
Duhśāsanaś ca putras te, sūta|putraś ca dur|jayaḥ  
samāgamyā, mahā|rāja, mantram cakrur vivakṣitam:  
«katham Pāṇḍu|sutāḥ samkhye jetavyāḥ sa|gaṇā?» iti.  
tato Duryodhano rājā sarvāms tān āha mantriṇaḥ,  
sūta|putram samābhāṣya, Saubalaḥ ca mahā|balaḥ:  
«Droṇo, Bhīṣmaḥ, Kṛpaḥ, Śalyaḥ, Saumadattis ca saṃyuge  
na Pārthān pratibādhante. na jāne tatra kāraṇam.
- 97.5 a|vadhyamānās te c' āpi kṣapayanti balaḥ mama.  
so 'smi kṣīṇa|balaḥ, Karṇa, kṣīṇa|śastraś ca saṃyuge.  
nikṛtaḥ Pāṇḍavaīḥ sūrain a|vadhyair daivatair api  
so 'haṃ saṃśayam āpannaḥ: prahariṣye katham raṇe?»  
tam abravīn, mahā|rāja, sūta|putro nar'|ādhipam.

KARṆA uvāca:

- mā śuco, Bharata|śreṣṭha. kariṣye 'haṃ priyaḥ tava.  
Bhīṣmaḥ Śāntanavas tūrṇam apayātu mahā|raṇāt.  
nivr̥tte yudhi Gāṅgeye nyasta|śastre ca, Bhārata,  
ahaṃ Pārthān haniṣyāmi sahitān sarva|Somakaiḥ  
paśyato yudhi Bhīṣmasya. śape satyena te, nṛ|pa!
- 97.10 Pāṇḍaveṣu dayāḥ, rājan, sa hi Bhīṣmaḥ karoti vai;  
a|śaktaś ca raṇe Bhīṣmo jetum etān mahā|rathān.  
abhimānī raṇe Bhīṣmo, nityaḥ c' āpi raṇa|priyaḥ.  
sa katham Pāṇḍavān yuddhe jeṣyate, tāta, saṃgatān?  
sa tvaṃ śighram ito gatvā Bhīṣmasya śībiraḥ prati,  
anumānya guruḥ vṛddhaḥ śastraḥ nyāsaya, Bhārata.



SÁNJAYA said:

THEN KING DURYÓDHANA, Shákuni the son of Súbala, 97.1  
your son Duhshásana, and the charioteer's son Karna  
who is difficult to vanquish took counsel together as to  
how the sons of Pandu might be defeated in combat, great  
king. King Duryódhana, addressing the charioteer's son and  
the mighty son of Súbala, told all the counsellors: "Drona,  
Bhishma, Kripa, Shalya, and the son of Soma-datta can-  
not resist the sons of Pritha in battle. I do not know the 97.5  
reason why not. Without having been killed, the Pándavas  
have been destroying my forces. So I am growing weaker in  
power, Karna, and running out of weapons in combat. Hu-  
miliated by the heroic Pándavas, who cannot be slain even  
by the gods, I am doubtful how I ought to fight with them  
in battle." And the charioteer's son replied to the great king.

KARNA said:

Do not grieve, best of the Bharatas! I shall do what will  
please you. But the son of Shántanu should immediately be  
withdrawn from this great battle. When the son of Ganga  
lays down his arms and stops fighting, I will kill the sons of  
Pritha and all the Sómakas in battle while Bhishma looks  
on. I swear to you on the truth, Your Majesty! Bhishma 97.10  
always treats the Pándavas sympathetically; that's why he  
is not able to defeat these great warriors in battle. And  
anyway, Bhishma is proud in combat and is always fond  
of fighting. How then will he defeat the assembled Pán-  
davas, dear sir, and put an end to the war? So go quickly  
to Bhishma's tent, and convince the revered teacher to lay  
down his arms, Bhárata. After Bhishma has laid down his

nyasta|śastre tato Bhīṣme nihātān paśya Pāṇḍavān  
may” āikena raṇe, rājan, sa|suhṛd|gaṇa|bāndhavān.

SAÑJAYA uvāca:

evam uktas tu Karṇena putro Duryodhanas tava  
abravīd bhrātaraṃ tatra Duḥśāsanam idaṃ vacaḥ:

97.15 «anuyātraṃ yathā sarvaṃ sajjī|bhavati sarvaśaḥ,  
Duḥśāsana, tathā kṣipraṃ sarvam ev’ ōpapādaya.»

evam uktvā tato, rājan, Karṇam āha jan’|ēśvaraḥ:

«anumānya raṇe Bhīṣmam eṣo ’haṃ dvi|padāṃ varam  
āgamīṣye tataḥ kṣipraṃ tvat|sakāśam, arin|dama.  
apakrānte tato Bhīṣme prahariṣyasi saṃyuge.»

niṣpapāta tatas tūrṇaṃ putras tava, viśāṃ pate,  
sahito bhrātr̥bhiḥ sarvair, devair iva Śatakratuḥ.  
tatas taṃ nṛpa|śārdūlaṃ śārdūla|sama|vikramam  
ārohayadd hayaṃ tūrṇaṃ bhrātā Duḥśāsanas tadā.

97.20 aṅgadī, baddha|mukuṭo, hast’|ābharaṇavān nṛ|paḥ  
Dhārtarāṣṭro, mahā|rāja, vibabhau sa pathi vrajan.

bhaṅḍī|puṣpa|nikāśena tapanīya|nibhena ca  
anuliptaḥ par’|ārdhyena candanena su|gandhinā,  
a|rajo|’mbara|saṃvītaḥ, siṃha|khela|gatir nṛ|paḥ  
śúsubhe vimal’|ārciṣman nabhas’ īva divā|karaḥ.

taṃ prayāntaṃ nara|vyāghraṃ Bhīṣmasya śibiraṃ prati  
anujagmur mah”|ēṣv|āsāḥ sarva|lokasya dhanvinaḥ,  
bhrātaraś ca mah”|ēṣv|āsās, tri|daśā iva Vāsavam.  
hayān anye samāruhya, gajān anye ca, Bhārata,

arms you will see the Pándavas slain in battle, with their friends and relatives, by me alone.

SÁNJAVA said:

Addressed in this way by Karna, your son Duryódhana then spoke to his brother Duhshásana. "Duhshásana, arrange for my retinue to be completely ready as soon as possible." 97.15

Having said this, Your Majesty, the lord of men spoke to Karna:

"After convincing Bhishma, that best of men, in debate, I shall immediately come to you, tamer of enemies. When Bhishma has withdrawn, you will smite the foes in combat." Then your son set out, lord of the people, surrounded by all his brothers like Shata-kratu surrounded by the gods. His brother Duhshásana quickly helped that tiger-like king, who was a tiger's equal in strength, to mount his horse. Adorned with bracelets, with a diadem on his head, and wearing ornaments on his arms, your son the king looked resplendent as he proceeded along the road, great king. Smeared with precious and fragrant sandal paste which was the color of *bhandi* flowers and had the luster of gold, dressed in dustless garments, and moving with the playful gait of a lion, Your Majesty, he shone like the pure-rayed sun in the sky. As that tiger-like man proceeded toward Bhishma's tent, mighty archers renowned all over the world followed him, armed with their bows; his brothers, those great bowmen, followed him just as the gods follow Vāsava. Some rode horses, others elephants, and still others rode on chariots, descendant of Bharata. They surrounded that best 97.20 97.25

97.25 rathān anye nara|śreṣṭhāḥ parivavruḥ samantataḥ.  
 ātta|śastrās ca su|hr̥do rakṣaṇ'|ārthaṃ mahī|pateḥ  
 prādur|babhūvuḥ sahitāḥ, Śakrasy' ēv' āmarā divi.

sa pūjyamānaḥ Kurubhiḥ Kauravāṇāṃ mahā|balaḥ  
 prayayau sadanaṃ rājā Gāṅgeyasya yaśasvinaḥ,  
 anvīyamānaḥ satataṃ s'|ōdaraiḥ parivāritaḥ.  
 dakṣiṇaṃ dakṣiṇaḥ kāle saṃbhṛtya sva|bhujam tadā  
 hasti|hast'|ōpamaṃ, śaikṣaṃ, sarva|śatru|nibarhaṇam,  
 pragṛhṇann añjalīn nṛṇāṃ udyatān sarvato diśaḥ,  
 śuśrāva madhurā vāco nānā|deśa|nivāsinām,

97.30 saṃstūyamānaḥ sūtaiś ca māgadhaiś ca mahā|yaśāḥ,  
 pūjayānaś ca tān sarvān sarva|lok'|ēśvar'|ēśvaraḥ.  
 pradīpaiḥ kāñcanaś tatra gandha|tail'|āvasacitaiḥ  
 parivavrur mah"ātmanāṃ prajvaladbhiḥ samantataḥ.  
 sa taiḥ parivṛto rājā pradīpaiḥ kāñcanaḥ śubhaiḥ  
 śuśubhe, candramā yukto dīptair iva mahā|grahaiḥ.  
 kāñcan'|ōṣṇīṣiṇas tatra vetra|jharjhara|pāṇayaḥ  
 protsārayantaḥ śanakais taṃ janaṃ sarvato|diśam.

saṃprāpya tu tato rājā Bhīṣmasya sadanaṃ śubham,  
 avatīrya hayāc c' āpi Bhīṣmaṃ prāpya jan'|ēśvaraḥ,

97.35 abhivādya tato Bhīṣmaṃ niṣaṇṇaḥ param'|āsane  
 kāñcane, sarvato|bhadre, spardhy'|āstaraṇa|saṃvṛte,  
 uvāca prāñjalir Bhīṣmaṃ bāṣpa|kaṇṭho 'śru|locanaḥ:

«tvāṃ vayaṃ hi samāsṛitya saṃyuge, śatru|sūdana,  
 utsahema raṇe jetuṃ s'|Êndrān api sur'|āsurān;  
 kim u Pāṇḍu|sutān vīrān sa|suhṛd|gaṇa|bāndhavān?  
 tasmād arhasi, Gāṅgeya, kṛpāṃ kartuṃ mayi, prabho.

of kings on all sides. Armed with weapons, his friends went along for the king's protection, accompanying him just as the gods accompany Shakra in heaven.

Revered by the Kurus, that powerful king of the Káuravas proceeded to the tent of the glorious son of Ganga, followed all the way and surrounded by his brothers. Duly raising his skillful right arm, which was as mighty as elephant's trunk and able to destroy all enemies, the dexterous king accepted the respects paid by men on every side with their raised and folded hands, and heard the sweet words of people from different countries. The glorious king of the kings of all places, praised by bards and panegyrists, honored all of them in turn. People surrounded the great king on all sides with burning golden lamps filled with fragrant oil. And the king, illuminated by those golden lamps, shone like the moon surrounded by the great shining planets. Then attendants wearing golden turbans, with canes and drums in their hands, gradually dispersed the crowd in all directions. 97.30

Reaching Bhishma's beautiful tent and descending from his horse, the lord of men went up to Bhishma. Saluting Bhishma, the king sat down on an exquisite symmetrical golden seat overlaid with a fine coverlet. Folding his hands in obeisance, with damp eyes and a tear-choked throat, he spoke to Bhishma: 97.35

"Relying on you in battle, slayer of enemies, we could conquer even the gods and demons in battle, including Indra himself. What then of the Pándavas with their friends, allies, and relatives? Therefore, lord, son of Ganga, you must take pity on me. Slaughter the heroic sons of Pandu, like

jahi Pāṇḍu|sutān vīrān, mah”|Ēndra iva dānavān.  
 ‹aham sarvān, mahā|rāja, nihaniṣyāmi Somakān,  
 Pañcālān Kekayaiḥ sārddham, Karūṣāṃś c’›, éti, Bhārata,  
 97.40 tvad|vacāḥ satyam ev’ āstu! jahi Pārthān samāgatān,  
 Somakāṃś ca mah”|éṣv|āsān! satya|vāg bhava, Bhārata!  
 dayayā yadi vā, rājan, dveṣya|bhāvān mama, prabho,  
 manda|bhāgyatayā v” āpi mama rakṣasi Pāṇḍavān,  
 anujānīhi samare Karṇam āhava|śobhinam!  
 sa jeṣyati raṇe Pārthān sa|suhṛd|gaṇa|bāndhavān.»  
 etāvad uktvā nṛ|patih putro Duryodhanas tava,  
 n’ ōvāca vacanam kiṃ cid Bhīṣmaṃ satya|parākramam.

SAÑJAYA uvāca:

98.1 VĀK|ŚALYAIŚ TAVA putreṇa so ’tividdho mahā|manāḥ  
 duḥkhena mahat” āviṣṭo n’ ōvāc’ ā|priyam aṇv api.  
 sa dhyātvā su|ciraṃ kālāṃ duḥkha|roṣa|samanvitaḥ,  
 śvasamāno yathā nāgaḥ, praṇunno vāk|śalākayā,  
 udvṛtya cakṣuṣī kopān, nirdahann iva, Bhārata,  
 sa|dev’|āśura|gandharvaṃ lokam loka|vidāṃ varaḥ,  
 abravīt tava putram tu

sāma|pūrvam idaṃ vacāḥ:

«kiṃ tvam, Duryodhan’, āivam māṃ

vāk|śalyair apakṛntasi

98.5 ghaṭamānaṃ yathā|śakti, kurvāṇaṃ ca tava priyam,  
 juhvānaṃ samare prāṇāṃś tava vai hita|kāmyayā?  
 yadā tu Pāṇḍavaḥ sūraḥ Khāṇḍave ’gnim atarpayat  
 parājitya raṇe Śakraṃ—paryāptam tan nidarśanam.  
 yadā ca tvāṃ, mahā|bāho, gandharvair hṛtam ojasā

great Indra slaughtering demons. 'Great king, I will kill the Sómakas, the Panchálas, the Kékayas, and the Karúshas'— such were your words to me, Bhárata. May they come true! 97.40 Kill the assembled sons of Pritha, along with the Sómakas, those mighty archers! Be true to your word, descendant of Bharata! If you are sparing the Pándavas out of sympathy, or, unfortunately for me, out of hatred toward myself, then allow Karna, resplendent in battle, to fight! He will defeat the sons of Pritha with their friends, allies, and relatives." Your royal son Duryódhana said this to Bhishma, whose power is in truth; and he said nothing more.

SÁNJAYA said:

GREAT-SPIRITED Bhishma, hurt by the arrows of your 98.1 son's speech and overcome by deep sorrow, did not say even a single displeasing word in reply. Filled with grief and anger, he thought for a long time, hurt by those thorny words and sighing like an elephant goaded by a sharp stick. Then that best of experts in the ways of the world, raising his eyes as if he was about to burn down the entire world in his rage along with the gods, demons and *gandhárvas*, descendant of Bharata, calmly addressed your son as follows.

"Why are you afflicting me with these words like arrows, Duryódhana? Being your well-wisher, I have been striving 98.5 to the best of my powers to do you good, ready to sacrifice my life in combat. Pandu's valiant son, having defeated Shakra himself in battle, gratified Agni by letting him consume the Khándava forest. That should suffice to show what Árjuna is like. That son of Pandu with his power rescued you, mighty-armed one, when you had been captured by

amocayat Pāṇḍu|sutaḥ—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.  
 dravamāṇeṣu sūreṣu s' |ōdareṣu tava, prabho,  
 sūta|putre ca Rādheye—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.

yac ca naḥ sahitān sarvān Virāṭa|nagare tadā  
 eka eva samudyātaḥ—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.

98.10 Droṇaṃ ca yudhi saṃrabdhaṃ, māṃ ca nirjitya saṃyuge,  
 vāsāṃsi sa samādatta—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.

tathā Drauniṃ mah" |ēṣv|āsaṃ, Śāradvatam ath' āpi ca  
 go|grahe jitavān pūrvam—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.  
 vijitya ca yadā Karṇaṃ sadā puruṣa|māninam

Uttarāyai dadau vastraṃ—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.  
 nivāta|kavacān yuddhe Vāsaven' āpi dur|jayān  
 jitavān samare Pārthaḥ—paryāptaṃ tan nidarśanam.

ko hi śakto raṇe jetuṃ Pāṇḍavaṃ rabhasaṃ tadā,  
 yasya goptā jagad|goptā śāṅkha|cakra|gadā|dharāḥ

98.15 Vāsudevo 'n|anta|śaktiḥ, sṛṣṭi|saṃhāra|kāraḥ,  
 sarv' |ēśvaro, deva|devaḥ, param' |ātmā sanātanaḥ?

ukto 'si bahuśo, rājan, Nārad' |ādyair maha" |rṣibhiḥ;  
 tvam tu mohān na jānīṣe vācy' |ā|vācyam, Suyodhana.  
 mumūrṣur hi naraḥ sarvān vṛkṣān paśyati kāñcanān,  
 tathā tvam āpi, Gāndhāre, viparītāni paśyasi.

svayaṃ vairaṃ mahat kṛtvā Pāṇḍavaḥ saha|Sṛñ|jayaiḥ  
 yudhyasva tān! adya raṇe paśyāmaḥ. puruṣo bhava!



*gandhárvas*. That should suffice to show what he is like. O lord, at that time your heroic brothers and Karna, the son of Radha and the charioteer, had fled away, and Árvjuna rescued you. That should suffice to show what he is like.

In Viráta's city Árvjuna alone rose up against all our joint troops. That should suffice to show what he is like. He 98.10  
conquered Drona and myself in combat and took away our garments. That should suffice to show what he is like. Viráta's cattle had been stolen, and Árvjuna defeated Drona's son, that mighty archer, and even the son of Sharárvat. That should suffice to show what he is like. After defeating Karna, who is always proud of his manliness, Árvjuna gave Karna's garments to Princess Uttará. That should suffice to show what he is like. In battle the son of Pritha vanquished the demons whose armor is impenetrable, whom even Vásava found hard to vanquish. That should suffice to show what he is like. Who can defeat that mighty son of Pandu in combat, whose protector is the protector of the universe himself, the wielder of the conch, discus, and mace—Vásu-deva endowed with limitless might, the cre- 98.15  
ator and destroyer of the world, the lord of all, the god of gods, the supreme soul, the eternal one?

Your Majesty, you have been told again and again by Nárada and other sages, but out of delusion you do not know what should be said and what should not, Suyódhana. Just as a man on the verge of death sees all trees as made of gold, so you, son of Gandhári, see everything upside down. You yourself have stirred up this great feud with the Pándavas and the Srínjayas. Now fight with them! We'll

ahaṃ tu Somakān sarvān, Pañcālāṃś ca samāgatān  
nihanīṣye, nara|vyāghra, varjayitvā Śikhaṇḍinam.

98.20 tair v” āhaṃ nihataḥ saṃkhye gamiṣye Yama|śādanam;  
tān vā nihatyā saṃgrāme prītiṃ dāsyāmy ahaṃ tava.  
pūrvam hi strī samutpannā Śikhaṇḍī rāja|veśmani;  
vara|dānāt pumāñ jātaḥ. s” āiṣā vai strī Shikhaṇḍinī.  
tām ahaṃ na haniṣyāmi prāṇa|tyāge ’pi, Bhārata;  
y” āsau prāñ nirmītā Dhātrā, s” āiṣā vai strī Shikhaṇḍinī.  
sukhaṃ svapihi, Gāndhāre. śvo ’smi kartā mahā|raṇam,  
yaṃ janāḥ kathayiṣyanti yāvat sthāsyati medinī.»

evam uktas tava suto nirjagāma, jan’|lēśvara;  
abhivādya guruṃ mūrdhnā prayayau svaṃ niveśanam.

98.25 āgamyā tu tato rājā, viśṛjya ca mahāl|janam,  
praviveśa tatas tūrṇam kṣayam śatru|kṣayañ|karaḥ;  
praviṣṭaḥ sa niśāṃ tām ca gamayām āsa pārthivaḥ.

prabhātāyāṃ tu śarvāryāṃ prātar utthāya vai nr̥|paḥ  
rājñāḥ samājñāpayata: «senāṃ yojayat’!» ēti ha;  
«adya Bhīṣmo raṇe kruddho nihanīṣyati Somakān!»

Duryodhanasya tac chrutvā rātrau vilapitaṃ bahu  
manyamānaḥ sa taṃ, rājan, pratyādeśam iv’ ātmanaḥ.  
nirvedaṃ paramaṃ gatvā, vinindya para|vaśyatām,  
dīrghaṃ dadhyau Śāntanavo yoddhu|kāmo ’rjunaṃ raṇe.

98.30 inḡitena tu taj jñātvā Gāṅgeyena vicintitam  
Duryodhano, mahā|rāja, Duḥśāsanam acodayat:

see you in battle. Be a man! As for me, I will kill all the mustered Sómakas and Panchálas except Shikhándin, tiger-like man; I will either go to the realm of Yama, killed by them in battle, or I will make you happy by killing them. First he was born in the royal palace as a female, Shikhándini; then, through a boon, she became a male. I'll not strike him even at the cost of my life, descendant of Bharata, for that one is the same woman Shikhándini as was originally made by the Creator. Sleep well, son of Gandhári. Tomorrow I shall fight a great battle, and people will speak of it as long as the earth lasts." 98.20

Addressed in this way, lord of men, your son honored the mentor with a bow of the head and went to his own tent. Reaching it, the king, that destroyer of enemies, dismissed his numerous attendants and quickly entered the tent; and after he had entered it the king spent the night in sleep. 98.25

At daybreak, when the night had passed, the king got up and commanded the kings: "Draw up the troops! Today Bhishma will slaughter the Sómakas in his battle-fury!"

After hearing Duryodhana's bitter lamentations the previous night, Bhishma considered them a command to himself, Your Majesty. The son of Shántanu felt deep distress, deplored his situation of dependence, and pondered for a long while, wanting to fight against Árjuna in battle. Understanding the signs of what Ganga's son intended, Your Majesty, Duryódhana gave Duhshásana his orders: 98.30

«Duḥśāsana, rathās tūrṇaṃ yujyantāṃ Bhīṣma|rakṣiṇaḥ.  
 dvā|triṃśatim anīkāni sarvāṇy ev' ābhicodaya.  
 idaṃ hi samanuprāptaṃ varṣa|pūg'ābhicintitam  
 Pāṇḍavānāṃ sa|sainyānāṃ vadho, rājyasya c' āgamaḥ.  
 tatra kāryatamaṃ manye Bhīṣmasy' āiv' ābhirakṣaṇam.  
 sa no guptaḥ sahāyaḥ syādd, hanyāt Pārthamś ca saṃyuge.  
 abravīdd hi viśuddh'ātma: «n' āhaṃ hanyāṃ Śikhaṇḍinam.  
 strī|pūrvako hy asau jātas. tasmād varjyo raṇe mayā.

98.35 lokas tad veda, yad ahaṃ pituḥ priya|cikīrṣayā  
 rājyaṃ sphītaṃ, mahā|bāho, striyaś ca tyaktavān purā.  
 n' āiva c' āhaṃ striyaṃ jātu, na strī|pūrvam kathaṃ cana  
 hanyāṃ yudhi, nara|śreṣṭha. satyam etad bravīmi te.  
 ayaṃ strī|pūrvako, rājañ, Śikhaṇḍī, yadi te śrutaḥ  
 udyoge kathitaṃ yat tat. tathā jātā Śikhaṇḍinī  
 kanyā bhūtvā pumāñ jātaḥ. sa ca yotsyati, Bhārata.  
 tasy' āhaṃ pramukhe bāṇān na muñceyaṃ kathaṃ cana.  
 yuddhe hi kṣatriyāṃs, tāta, Pāṇḍavānāṃ jay'|āiṣiṇaḥ  
 sarvān anyān haniṣyāmi saṃprāptān raṇa|mūrdhani.»

98.40 evaṃ māṃ Bharata|śreṣṭho Gāṅgeyaḥ prāha śāstra|vit.  
 tatra sarv'ātmanā manye Gāṅgeyas' āiva pālanam.  
 a|rakṣyamāṇam hi vṛko hanyāt siṃham mah"āhave.  
 mā vṛken' ēva śārdūlam ghātayema Śikhaṇḍinā.  
 mātulaḥ Śakuniḥ, Śalyaḥ, Kṛpo, Droṇo, Vivimśatiḥ  
 yattā rakṣantu Gāṅgeyaṃ. tasmin gupte dhruvo jayaḥ.»

“Quickly, arrange chariots to protect Bhishma, Duhshásana. Invigorate each one of our twenty-two divisions. Now we have the opportunity for what we have sought all these years: the killing of the Pándavas and their troops, and the acquisition of the kingdom. As I see it, protecting Bhishma is our most important task. If we protect him, he will assist us by killing the sons of Pritha in battle. That pure-spirited hero told me: ‘I will not strike Shikhándin. For he was once female, so I must shun him in battle. The whole world knows that in the past, wishing to do a favor for my father, I renounced the thriving kingdom and the company of women, mighty-armed hero. And I will never strike any female in battle, or anyone who was a female in the past, best of kings. I’m telling you the truth. Your Majesty, you have heard that first this Shikhándin was born as a female, and was called Shikhándini—I told you so myself, during the preparation for the war.\* Born as a girl, he has become a man. He will fight with me, but I will not fire my arrows at him by any means. Yet in this war I will kill every other warrior who confronts me at the forefront of battle, desiring victory for the Pándavas.’” 98.35

This is what the son of Ganga, that expert in advice, has told me, best of the Bharatas. So I think we must protect Ganga’s son wholeheartedly. Even a wolf can kill an unprotected lion in a great battle; so we should not let the son of Ganga be slain by Shikhándin. Our uncle Shákuni, Shalya, Kripa, Drona, and Vivímshati must protect the son of Ganga. If he is duly guarded, our victory is certain.” 98.40

etac chrutvā tu te sarve Duryodhana|vacas tadā  
sarvato ratha|vaṁśena Gāṅgeyaṃ paryavārayan.  
putrās ca tava Gāṅgeyaṃ parivārya yayur mudā  
kampayanto bhuvaṃ dyāṃ ca, kṣobhayantaś ca Pāṇḍavān.

98.45 te rathais ca su|saṃyuktair, dantibhiś ca mahā|rathāḥ  
parivārya raṇe Bhīṣmaṃ daṃśitāḥ samavasthitāḥ,  
yathā dev'āsure yuddhe tri|daśā vajra|dhāriṇam,  
sarve te sma vyatiṣṭhanta rakṣantas taṃ mahā|ratham.

tato Duryodhano rājā punar bhrātaram abravīt:

«savyaṃ cakraṃ Yudhāmanyur, Uttamaujās ca dakṣiṇam  
goptārāv Arjunasy' āitāv; Arjuno 'pi Śikhaṇḍinaḥ.  
sa rakṣyamāṇaḥ Pārthena, tath' āsmābhir vivarjitaḥ,  
yathā Bhīṣmaṃ na no hanyād, Duḥśāsana tathā kuru.»

bhrātus tad vacanaṃ śrutvā putro Duḥśāsanas tava  
98.50 Bhīṣmaṃ pramukhataḥ kṛtvā prayayau saha senayā.

Bhīṣmaṃ tu ratha|vaṁśena dṛṣṭvā samabhisamvṛtam  
Arjuno rathināṃ śreṣṭho Dhṛṣṭadyumnam uvāca ha:

«Śikhaṇḍinaṃ, nara|vyāghra,

Bhīṣmasya pramukhe, 'n|agha,  
sthāpayasv' ādya, Pāñcālya.

tasya gopt' āham» ity uta.

Hearing Duryódhana's instructions, all of your troops surrounded Ganga's son with hordes of chariots on every side; and your sons surrounded the son of Ganga too and advanced gladly, shaking the earth and sky and causing some agitation among the Pándava troops. Those great warriors stood wearing their armor, surrounding Bhishma with well-equipped chariots and elephants. All of them stood ready to protect that mighty warrior, like the gods protecting thunderbolt-wielding Indra during the battle between the gods and demons. 98.45

Then King Duryódhana spoke to his brother once again: "Yudha·manyu protects the left wheel of Árjuna's chariot, and Uttamájus protects the right one. Protected by them, Árjuna is Shikhándin's protector. Protected by the son of Pritha, Shikhándin might be ignored by us and thus find himself in a position to kill our Bhishma; so make arrangements, Duhshásana, such that he is not."

Hearing his brother's words, your son Duhshásana, with Bhishma before him, marched forward along with the troops. 98.50

And when he saw Bhishma surrounded by a chariot host, Árjuna, that best of chariot warriors, told Dhrishtadyumna:

"Your Highness, prince of the Panchálas, place Shikhándin, that tiger-like man, opposite Bhishma. I shall be his protector."



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While leading his patrons, the Káuravas, towards violent victory on the battlefield, the general Bhishma's position is explicitly ambiguous. His destiny here, partly determined by his own earlier self-sacrifice in committing to celibacy, is interwoven with the story of a woman whose righteous anger wins her a gender-swap and the power to kill him.

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