

THE BATTLEFIELD OF KURUKSHETRA

In the first verse of the Bhagavad Gita, the first two words are *Dharmakshetra* and *Kurukshetra*. The word Kuru is derived from the Sanskrit root “Kri” meaning work or action; and *Kshetra* is field. Hence, Kurukshetra means “the field of action.” This *Kurukshetra* is also being referred as the *Dharmakshetra* because it is here that the forces of *Dharma* and *Adharma*, of good and evil have aligned themselves against each other for a decisive battle.

Outwardly, Kurukshetra is not only a field of battle but also a *Dharmakshetra* – the field of Dharma, righteousness – where the eternal conflict between right and wrong, duty and ethics, Self and ego are undergoing a battle. It is as much an inner battleground as the outer.

In Kurukshetra, the two armies had assembled. Arjuna, suddenly gets an attack of nerves, starts talking like a sentimental fool and starts lecturing on the merits of renunciation and non-violence! He says, *I would rather beg for the rest of my life than fight*. A person who has been a valiant warrior all his life!

“Seeing, O Krishna, these my kinsmen, gathered here eager for fight, my limbs fail me, my mouth is parched up, I shiver all over my body; my hair stands on end; the bow, Gandiva slips from my hands; and my skin burns...”

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter I, Verse 28-29

The magnitude of the task at hand completely overwhelms him and he throws down his quiver and bow and refuses to fight. You could say that it was a loss of nerve or a nervous and mental breakdown that Arjuna suffered. But actually there is no escape from this Kurukshetra. For escape would mean leaving the field for Adharma to run amok and fighting would mean killing and bloodshed. The choice is not easy. It’s

not a game of black and white but of various shades of grey. Kurukshetra (and Dharmakshetra) is ambiguous, messy **and** subtle. It is an inner battlefield of the soul as well as the outer field of action in the world.

Now, is Arjuna's situation unique? And the Kurukshetra that is described in the Mahabharata, just a momentous event from the epic having no relevance to our lives? Are we too not "Arjunas" facing our own Kurukshetra with our own inner conflicts and moral dilemmas? Was the Gita given only to Arjuna? Was it not for the entire mankind?

For the teaching of the Gita was not given in the secluded cloister in a monastery to the renunciate but to a warrior in the battlefield! It is addressed to a fighter, a man of action. Because a philosophy that is detached from the heat and dust of the battlefield of life, is useless! So the Gita is an instruction manual to live life.

Arjuna is confused because he sees on the other side arrayed against him are his own brothers, uncles, teachers, grandsires and friends. He is being asked to kill them all! For what? A mere kingdom? A throne? He is overwhelmed anticipating the enormity of the scale of destruction that this battle must bring about. And throughout the first chapter and into the opening verses of the second chapter, he voices his anguish and lament about this terrible act of "moral transgression" that he is being asked to commit. He even says that he would rather beg for the rest of his life or take to *sannyas* by renouncing the world than be a part of this wanton destruction. Finally, he lays down his arms and declares that he is not going to fight.

This battlefield of Kurukshetra becomes the stage for the celestial song of the Lord – the Bhagavad Gita. The "Krishna cure" for the "Arjuna disease". After the teaching is concluded, Arjuna is a new man. He picks up his bow and is ready to fight.