

Lyrical Tension Excerpt

This is an excerpt from the script of "Lyrical Tension," an adaptation of the Mahabharata story performed at the University of Michigan in 2007.

Script for "Lyrical Tension": The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata is the story of a tragic feud between two branches of the noble Bharata family—the Pandāwās and the Kurāwās. The Pandāwās and their Kurāwā cousins competed playfully as children, but their harmless childhood games grew into a bloody battle for control of their homeland when the Kurāwā's wicked uncle, Prime Minister Sangkuni fanned the flames of jealousy and greed in his nephews and plotted with them to cheat the unsuspecting Pandāwās out of their lands.

Ancient teachings depict the war as a struggle between the forces of good, represented by the Pandāwās, and the forces of evil, represented by the Kurāwās. But was it really a battle between good and evil? Or were the young Kurāwās and Pandāwās manipulated, like puppets in a shadow play, by greedy mortals and by capricious gods for their own purposes? Was the war worth its terrible price? This is our story tonight.

Forced by the Kurāwās into a twelve year exile, the Pandāwās, bore their sufferings patiently under the guidance of their oldest brother, Yudhistirā. He wisely guided his younger brothers Ardjunā, Nakulā and Sadewā. He calmed his hot tempered brother Bimā and taught the Pandāwās the ways of goodness.

Meanwhile Kurāwas learned very different lessons. From the time they were children, the crafty Prime Minister Sangkuni taught the Kurāwās evil ways: the Kurāwās became their uncle's puppets. He pulled their strings at will leading them down paths of greed, gluttony and, most of all, an insatiable thirst for power over their Pandāwās cousins.

The gods saw all this: the Kurāwās cruelty and the Pandāwās pain. They sent Vishnu to earth, reincarnated as Kresnā, a cousin of the Pandāwā brothers, to help the Pandāwās. Kunthi, mother of the Pandāwās and

Gendari, mother of the Kurâwâs also tried to counsel their children wisely. Sadly, Gendari's good advice was undermined by the evil Sangkuni.

Songs of Kunthi and Gendari

Oh, my strong and courageous sons

The first duty of a warrior

Is to uphold the name of his ancestors

Honor the Bharata family

Protect our homeland

We ask for your blessings

And the blessing of our grandfather Bhismâ

And so, the Kurâwâs lived a life of self-indulgence, deceit and the pursuit of power, not caring for the cost to others. Meanwhile the Pandâwâs continued on in the ways of goodness and built a just and harmonious kingdom.

Song of Gendari and Sangkuni:

G: Oh my brother Sangkuni

S: My sister, Gendari

G: Lead my children, the Kurâwâs, to power and glory

May they become the true Rulers of our homeland

S: I will fight for the Kurâwâs, I ask your blessings

Sangkuni's Song

My heart's desire is to create a mighty nation

To raise the Kurâwâs to power

Make them the rulers of our homeland

We will seize the Pandâwâ's lands

My own cunning will make this come to pass
The power belongs to me! (It is I who have the might)

The Pandâwâs must be exiled!

Song of Kunthi and Kresnâ

Kunthi: My nephew, Kresnâ

Kresnâ: Yes, dear Aunt Kunthi

Kunthi: Bring your Pandâwâ cousins out of darkness

Protect them from sin and evil.

Kresnâ: This I will do with all my strength.

Kunthi: Bless my children as you protect them.

And so Sangkuni guided the Kurâwâs, while Kresnâ gently led the Pandâwâs. But Kresnâ's fury knew no bounds when the Kurâwâs refused to restore the Pandâwâs lands to them. It was war.

Chorus (Gérong) Sings

The Darkness of sin descends

The curse has hit its mark

Virtue has vanished

Clear waters now murky

The grandeur of nature polluted

Holy teachings forgotten

All is destroyed

Rivers of blood will flow in this War

The Bharatayudâ, the final terrible war, is now inevitable. No matter who wins, the blood shed will come from the same family. Is this fate—the will of the gods? Or have the Bharata family, themselves, brought about their destruction? The war has begun—hopes have become a Lyrical Tension. Kresnâ and Sangkuni are moving all towards the final cataclysmic conflict

Kresnå and Sangkuni matched wits on the battlefield. Before the war, the cunning Sangkuni had called the shots. Krishna now took the upper hand, leading the Pandåwås to victory, but at what cost? The Kuråwås fell, one by one, but the Pandåwås lost their dear ones too—brothers, cousins, mothers, fathers and children lay dead and dying. The blood of all the Bharata family mingled on the battlefield.

Last conversation between Sangkuni and Kresnå

S: What is the truth Lord?

K: Good will always conquer evil

S: No, power belongs not to the good, but to the cunning.

K: Why do you take what is not yours?

S: Why not? It belonged to no one else?

K: You are evil! You must be destroyed!

S: Must so much blood be shed for good to triumph?