

## **The Envoy (*Duta Vakyam*)**

**Bhasa**

### **Cast in order of appearance**

The Producer (in the Prologue)

Chamberlain (of the Kuru court, named Badarayana)

Duryodhana (also called Suyodhana, the King of the Kurus)

Krishna (the God Narayana incarnate, also called Vishnu, Keshava)

Sudarshana (the discus, the divine weapon of Vishnu personified)

Dhritarashtra (the blind old King, father of Duryodhana)

### **Other characters mentioned in the play**

Vaikarna (a Kuru noble)

Varshadeva (a Kuru noble)

Preceptor (Dronacharya, teacher of the Kauravas and the Pandavas)

Grandfather (Bhishma, elder of the Kuru clan, also called son of Ganga)

Uncle (Shakuni, prince of Gandhara, brother of Gandhari, Duryodhana's mother)

Karna (a famous warrior, friend of Duryodhana)

Draupadi (wife of the Pandava brothers, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and  
Sahadeva, the cousins of Duryodhana)

Duhshasana, Durmarshana, Durmukha, Durbuddhi, Dushteshvara (brothers of  
Duryodhana)

Vichitravirya (father of Dhritarashtra, husband of Ambika)

### **Prologue**

[After the benediction, enter the Producer]

Producer: May the feet of Vishnu protect you; the feet with slender rosy nails, which gladden all the worlds and which sent the demon Namuchi hurtling through the sky.

And now, distinguished spectators, I have to announce that – but what is that? There seems to be a sound just as I was about to start. Well, let me see.

[Voices off stage]

Voices: Attention! Attention, you guards. King Duryodhana has commanded...

Producer: Ah, I see. Discord having arisen between the sons of Dhritarashtra and the sons of Pandu, an attendant is preparing the council chamber at Duryodhana's command.

[Exit]

[End of Prologue]

### Act I

[Enter Chamberlain]

Chamberlain: Attention! Attention, you guards. King Duryodhana has commanded that all the princes be summoned as he wishes to consult with them today. But, oh, there is King Duryodhana himself coming this way. There, with the royal parasol and flywhisk. He wears a white silk mantle on his dark, youthful body, perfumed and gleaming with jewels. He is splendid, like the full moon among the stars.

[Enter Duryodhana, as described]

Duryodhana: The anger in my heart has suddenly given way to joy at the thought that the festival of war is at hand. Now my only wish is to tear out the tusks of the finest elephants in the Pandava army.

Chamberlain: Victory to the great king. All the princes have been assembled as commanded by Your Majesty.

Duryodhana: Well done. You may go inside.

Chamberlain: As Your Majesty commands. (exit)

DURYODHANA: My lord Vaikarna and Varshadeva, I have a force of eleven armies. Tell me, who is fit to be its commander -in -chief?

What did you say? It is an important matter. It should be decided after consultations. Quite so. Then come, let us go into the

Greetings, preceptor. Please come into the council chamber, sir. Greetings, grandfather, please come into the council chamber. Uncle, greetings. Please enter the council chamber. Enter, lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva. Enter freely, all you warriors. Comrade Karna, let us go in. (Entering) Preceptor, here is the tortoise throne, please be seated. Grandfather, please take your seat on the lion throne. Uncle, this is the leather throne. Please take a

seat. Lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva, please take a seat, please be seated all you warriors. What? The king is not seated? What devotion! Well, I will sit down. Friend Karna, please sit also. (Sitting down) Lords Vaikarna and Varshadeva, I have a force of eleven armies. Tell me, who should be its commander-in-chief? What did you say? Let the prince of Gandhara speak. Very well. Let my uncle speak. What did uncle say? Who else can be the Commander-in-chief when the son of Ganga is there? That is also our wish. Let the hearts of their leaders sink even as the son of Ganga is anointed to the roars of acclaim of our army.

[Enter the Chamberlain]

Chamberlain: Victory to your Majesty. Krishna, the best of men, has come from the Pandava camp as an envoy.

Duryodhana: Don't speak like that, Badarayana! Is that servant of Kansa your best of men? Is that herder of cows your best of men? Is that your best of men who was deprived by Jarasandha of his lands and reputation? Is this the way the king's servant should behave? With such insolent words? You . . .

Chamberlain: Have mercy, great king. I forgot the proper conduct in my confusion. (Falls at his feet)

Duryodhana: Confusion? Ah well, people do get confused. You may get up.

Chamberlain: Oh, thank you, Your Majesty.

Duryodhana: It is all right. Now, who is this envoy who has arrived?

Chamberlain: The envoy who has come is one Keshava.

Duryodhana: Keshava! That's better. That's the proper conduct.

O you princes, what will be proper for this Keshava who has come as an envoy? What did you say? He should be received with honours? That doesn't appeal to me. I see merit in arresting him. If Keshava is arrested the Pandavas would have lost their eyes, and, with the Pandavas deprived of direction and advice, the whole earth will be mine, without a rival.

Moreover, if anyone gets up to receive Keshava, he will be fined twelve gold coins by me. So, don't forget that, gentlemen. Now, what should be the reason for my not getting up? Ah, that's it, Badarayana! Bring me that painting which shows Draupadi being dragged by her hair and her garments. (Aside) I will look at it and not get up for Keshava.

Chamberlain: As Your Majesty commands. (Exits and re-enters) Victory to the great king. Here is that painting.

Duryodhana: Spread it out before me.

Chamberlain: As your majesty commands. (Spreads it out)

Duryodhana: This is a picture worth seeing. Here is Duhshasana, holding Draupadi by the hair. Here is Draupadi, seized by Duhshasana and wide-eyed with terror, she looks like a digit of the moon in eclipse.

And here is that wretched Bhima, sizing up the pillars of the hall as he angrily watches Draupadi being humiliated before all the princes. Here is Yudhishtira, quietening Bhima with sidelong looks. Here is the righteous and truthful one, stupefied by the game of dice.

And here now is Arjuna, eyes filled with rage, lips trembling. He has such contempt for his enemies. He slowly draws the string of his bow, as if he would destroy them all, but Yudhishtira stops him.

And here are Nakula and Sahadeva, faces flushed, swords in hand, ready to fight. Recklessly they attack my brother, like two calves against a tiger. But Yudhishtira restrains them. And here is the prince of Gandhara, laughing and casting the dice, as he gazes at the weeping Draupadi from his couch. And Grandfather and the preceptor stand here, covering their heads with their mantles, ashamed to see her. What rich colours! What fine expressions! How perfect a composition! This picture is really well done. I like it. Who is there?

Chamberlain: Victory to the great king.

Duryodhana: Badarayana, bring in that envoy who is so proud just because he rides on a bird.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands. [Exit]

Duryodhana: Well, Karna my friend. The crafty Krishna has come here on a mission, like a -servant of the Pandavas. Let us get ready to hear the soft feminine words of Yudhishtira.

[Enter Krishna with the chamberlain]

Krishna: It is not fitting to come as an envoy to the proud Suyodhana who grasps at even the unsaid word. But I am here today at the request of Yudhishtira and out of true friendship for Arjuna. The Kuru clan is going to be destroyed in the fire of Bhima's anger, fanned by Arjuna's arrows and the disgrace of Draupadi.

Well, here is Suyodhana's camp. The royal quarters look like paradise: the arsenals are full of weapons; the horses neigh and the elephants trumpet. But none of this opulence can survive war among kinsmen. This villain Suyodhana has no feelings for his kin. He

speaks ill, dislikes virtues and is not going to do what he should, even on seeing me. Well, Badarayana, should one go in?

Chamberlain: Of course, of course. Please enter, Krishna.

Krishna: (Entering) What is this? All the warriors seem confused on seeing me. Sit at ease, gentlemen. There is no need for any agitation.

Duryodhana: What is this? All the warriors seem confused on seeing Krishna. Enough of this. Please remember the fine which has been ordained. I give the orders here.

Krishna: Suyodhana, how are you?

Duryodhana: (Falling down from his seat, aside) It is clear that Krishna has arrived. I had made up my mind to keep sitting, but his power moved me from my seat. This envoy is a cunning magician. (Aloud) Here is a seat, ambassador, please be seated.

Krishna: Preceptor, take a seat. Bhishma and the princes, please sit as you wish. We will also sit. (Sits down) Oh, what a nice painting. But no! It depicts Draupadi being dragged by the hair! This childish Suyodhana thinks it brave to humiliate his kinsmen. Otherwise, who in this world would display his own faults in an assembly. O take away this painting.

Duryodhana: Badarayana! Take that picture away.

Chamberlain: As Your Majesty commands. (Removes picture)

Duryodhana: Well, ambassador, how are my brothers, the son of Dharma, Bhima the son of the wind god, Arjuna the son of the king of gods and the modest sons of the twin gods. Are they and their people well?

Krishna: Worthily spoken. O son of Gandhari, indeed they are all well. And they have also enquired about your welfare and that of your kingdom. Yudhishtira and his brothers also want to inform you that they have suffered many sorrows. The time has now come. So let the inheritance be divided, and the due share given to them.

Duryodhana: What inheritance? My uncle committed a crime while hunting in the forest. The sage cursed him and he became impotent with his wives. He had no progeny. How can a patrimony go to the sons of others?

Krishna: Since you know history, sir, let me also ask you. Vichitravirya was addicted to pleasures and died of the wasting sickness. Your father Dhritarashtra was born to Ambika from Vyasa. Then how did he succeed to the kingdom? No, no sir. By this way of mutual confrontation the Kuru clan may soon become just a name. It is better to give up anger and accept what Yudhishtira and the others have lovingly requested.

Duryodhana: Mister ambassador, you do not understand the ways of kings. One does not beg for a kingdom, nor give it as charity. Kingdoms are won by princes with stout hearts who defeat their enemies. If the Pandavas desire dominion let them act boldly. Otherwise let them enter a hermitage and live there with peace-minded monks.

Krishna: O that is enough of harsh words for your kinsmen, Suyodhana. Sovereignty is attained by the accumulated merit of past good deeds. All is lost by cheating relatives and well-wishers.

Duryodhana: You had no pity for King Kansa, the brother-in-law of your own father. Why should we have it for those who have always harmed us?

Krishna: That was not my fault. He invited death by imprisoning his old father and making my mother suffer the loss of successive sons.

Duryodhana: Kansa was wholly betrayed by you. There is no need for self-praise. It was not a brave deed. And where was your bravery when you fled, terrified, from the king of Magadha who was enraged at his son-in-law's murder?

Krishna: Suyodhana, the wise man's bravery accords with the time, the place and the situation. But, leave aside this mutual pleasantries and come to my business. Have love for your brothers, forget their faults. Good relations with kinsmen have merit in both this and the next world.

Duryodhana: How can there be kinship between mortal men and the sons of gods? You repeat the same old tale. It is enough. Put an end to it.

Krishna: (Aside) He does not change his attitude by conciliation. Well, I must try him with strong words. (Aloud) Suyodhana, don't you know the might and power of Arjuna?

Duryodhana: I don't.

Krishna: Listen. He gave satisfaction in battle to Lord Shiva disguised as a hunter. With his arrow he held off the downpour of rain over the burning Khandava forests. He destroyed the armoured demons as if in sport. He defeated Bhishma and the rest singlehanded at the city of king Virata.

Another thing you yourself witnessed. On your visit to the cattle farm, when Chitrasena carried you off screaming in the sky, Arjuna released you. In short, son of Dhritarashtra, kindly give half the kingdom as I have suggested. Otherwise the Pandavas will seize it right up to the sea.

Duryodhana: What did you say? The Pandavas will seize it? Let the wind-God in the shape of Bhima attack us in battle. Let the king of gods himself strike us in the person of

Arjuna. Not a blade of grass will I give of this kingdom, held and protected by my forefathers. Not for all your harsh words, ambassador.

Krishna: You worthless blot on the house of Kuru! Are we discussing blades of grass!

Duryodhana: Cowherd! Grass is indeed the thing for you, sir. Having killed an innocent woman, and horses and bulls and wrestlers, you shamelessly want to speak with respectable people!

Krishna: Suyodhana, are you chiding me?

Duryodhana: You are not worthy of being spoken with. I bear the royal white umbrella. My head is anointed with water from the hands of high priests. You are no better than a follower of my vassal kings. I do not speak with the likes of you. I tell them.

Krishna: Indeed, Suyodhana does not speak with me. You villain! You evil-eyed crow! You snake! The Kuru clan will soon be destroyed because of you. I leave now, O you princes.

Duryodhana: How can Krishna leave? He has transgressed the proper conduct of envoys. Duhshasana! Durmarshana! Durmukha! Durbuddhi! Dushteshvara! Arrest him! What? You cannot? Duh-shasana! You are not able? This Krishna has no strength or power. He is at fault by his own mouth in front of princes. He should be arrested immediately. But you cannot! Uncle, arrest Krishna! What? He turns his face and falls! Very well, I will arrest him myself. (Advances)

KRISHNA: Suyodhana wants to arrest me! Very well. Let me see if he can. (Assumes the Universal Form)

Duryodhana: Envoy, today you are going to be arrested by me in front of all these princes. Despite your pride. Even though you make magic black or white. Even though you use difficult divine weapons. Just wait. But how has Krishna disappeared? Ah, here he is. How small he seems. Just wait. How has he disappeared once more? Here he is. But there are Krishnas everywhere in the council chamber. What should I do now? Very well. O you princess, each one of you arrest one Krishna. What? The princes are falling down, bound with their own cords. Well done, magician, well done! The Pandavas shall see you with sighs and tearful eyes, when you are carried to their camp, with your limbs pieced by my arrows. (Exit)

Krishna: Very well. I will myself complete this work for the Pandavas. Come here, O Sudarshana!

[Enter Sudarshana, the divine discus]

Sudarshana: Here I am. Hearing the lord's voice, and with his grace, I have sped here through the clouds. At whom is the lotus-eyed lord angered? On whose head should I appear today? But where is the Lord Narayana, the protector of the world, the destroyer of enemies, the splendid of many forms, the first, the un-manifest and immeasurable soul? (Looking around) Ah, there is the lord; in the role of an envoy at the gate of Hastinaputa. Water! Where is the ritual water? Some water, O lady Ganga of the sky! Ah, it flows. (Performs ablution, and approaches) Victory to Lord Narayana! (Makes salutation).

Krishna: Sudarshana! Be matchless in power.

Sudarshana: I thank you.

Krishna: Fortunately, you have arrived just in time, sir.

Sudarshana: Just in time? Command me, lord, command me. Shall I overrun the mountains? Shall I convulse the sea? Shall I pluck out the stars? O God, by your grace there is nothing impossible for me.

Krishna: Come here, Sudarshana. And you, rash Suyodhana, whether you flee to mountain caves, or to the salty sea, or to the windswept, star-crossed sky, today my swift-propelled discus will be the discus of your death.

Sudarshana: Suyodhana, you wretch! (Thinking further) Mercy! Mercy, Lord Narayana. You have come upon this earth to ease its burdens. In this way, the effort would be wasted, O God!

Krishna: Sudarshana! The proper conduct was overlooked by me in anger. Return to your abode.

Sudarshana: As the Lord Narayana commands. How can he be called a cowherd? He who transcended the three worlds in three strides? All should seek refuge in him. I go... I will return to my dear recess in Mount Meru.

Krishna: I too will leave for the camp of the Pandavas. [Voice off stage]

Voice: No, no, he must not leave.

Krishna: That sounds like the old king. I am here, O king.

[Enter Dhritarashtra]

Dhritarashtra: Where is the Lord Narayana? Where is the Pandava's benefactor, the beloved of the virtuous, the delight of Devaki? O Ruler of the three worlds, my son offended you. Now my head is placed at your feet.

Krishna: Oh dear! Your Majesty prostrates! Arise, arise.



Dhritarashtra: I thank you, lord. Please accept this ritual water of welcome.

Krishna: I accept it all. What can I offer you in return?

Dhritarashtra: If the lord is pleased, what else can I wish for?

Krishna: Go, sir, till we meet again.

Dhritarashtra: As the Lord Narayana commands. (Exit)

### **Epilogue**

May the Lion King  
lead us on this land adorned  
by the Himalayas and the Vindhyas,  
and stretched from sea to sea  
in single sovereignty.

(Translated from the original Sanskrit by A.N.D. Haksar)