

Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 1 Chapter 7: The Son of Drona Punished

11 September 2026



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In the Pāṇḍava camp, Arjuna brings the bound Aśvatthāmā before the grieving Draupadī, who bows in compassion and pleads for the life of her sons' slayer.

Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

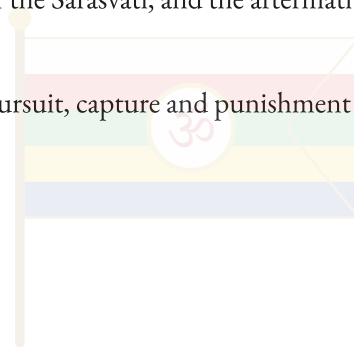
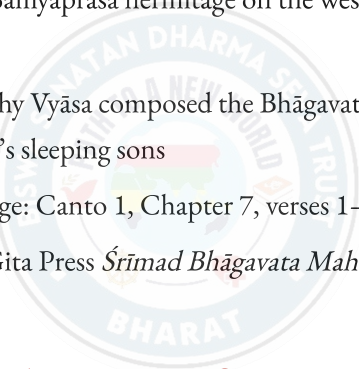
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Welcome to *Srimad Bhagavatam Wisdom*, a devotional journey through the sacred histories and teachings of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa. In the seventh chapter of the First Canto the scripture turns from the story of how it came to be composed to the first great human drama it will recount. Here we learn why the sage Vyāsa gave this book to the world, and then we are led onto the sorrowful field of Kurukṣetra, where a night-crime, a blazing weapon, a mother's grief and a woman's mercy together become a lesson in righteousness. It is a chapter of both foundation and fire.

Chapter Information

- Scripture: Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa
- Canto: 1 (Book One)
- Chapter: 7 (Discourse VII)
- Chapter title: The Son of Droṇa Punished
- Principal speaker: the blessed Sūta, Ugrasravā, the reciter of the ancient lore (with Śaunaka, Arjuna, Draupadī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa speaking within the narration)
- Principal listeners: Śaunaka and the assembled sages
- Main setting: the Śamyāprāsa hermitage on the western bank of the Sarasvatī, and the aftermath of the war at Kurukṣetra
- Central subject: why Vyāsa composed the Bhāgavata; and the pursuit, capture and punishment of Aśvatthāmā, the slayer of Draupadī's sleeping sons
- Principal verse range: Canto 1, Chapter 7, verses 1–58
- Primary edition: Gita Press *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*



A Question in the Forest of Naimiṣāraṇya

The chapter opens with a question. The divine sage Nārada has just departed, having counselled Vyāsa in the previous discourse. Now Śaunaka, seated among the sages, asks the reciter: when Nārada had gone, and Vyāsa had taken to heart all that the celestial sage had said, what did the all-powerful son of Satyavatī do next?

It is a small question with a great answer, for it opens the door to the very reason the Śrīmad Bhāgavata exists.

Vyāsa's Meditation on the Sarasvatī

Sūta replies. On the western bank of the river Sarasvatī, at a hermitage called Śamyāprāsa — a place that fosters the sacrificial life of the sages — Vyāsa had his own abode, ringed by a grove of jujube trees. There the sage sat down, sipped a little water, and by his own effort gathered his mind into stillness.



At the Shamyaprasa hermitage on the Sarasvati, the sage Vyasa collects his mind in meditation and beholds the Supreme Person and His Maya (verses 3-4).

In that flawless mind, made perfectly concentrated through the practice of devotion, Vyāsa beheld the Primal Person — and beside Him, Māyā, the deluding power that depends for her very existence upon the Lord. He saw how the individual soul, though in truth beyond the three modes of material nature, is bewildered by this Māyā into imagining itself made of those three modes, and so comes to suffer. And he saw the remedy: that loving devotion to the Lord, who lies beyond the reach of the senses, is itself the direct means of dispelling all this sorrow. Knowing that ordinary people did not know this saving truth, the learned sage composed the *Sātvata-Saṁhitā* — the Bhāgavata, the scripture of the devotees — for their sake.

अनर्थोपशमं साक्षाद्भक्तियोगमधोक्षजे ।

लोकस्याजानतो विद्वांश्चक्रे सात्वतसंहिताम् ॥ ६ ॥

anarthopāśamaṁ sākṣāḍ bhakti-yogam adhokṣaje lokasyājānato vidvāṁś cakre sātvata-saṁhitām

Meaning: Knowing that loving devotion to the transcendent Lord is the direct remedy for all the soul's miseries, the learned sage composed this Sātvata-Saṁhitā for the people who did not know it. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 6)

Why This Scripture Was Given

Then Sūta tells us the fruit of merely hearing this work. As a person listens to the Bhāgavata being recited, devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Person, wells up within the heart — and that devotion carries away grief, delusion and fear.

यस्यां वै श्रूयमाणायां कृष्णे परमपूरुषे ।

भक्तिरुत्पद्यते पुंसः शोकमोहभयापहा ॥ ७ ॥

yasyāṁ vai śrūyamāṇāyāṁ kṛṣṇe parama-pūruṣe bhaktir utpadyate puṁsaḥ śoka-moha-bhayāpahā

Meaning: Simply by hearing this scripture, devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Person, arises in the heart — devotion that drives away grief, delusion and fear. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 7)

Having composed and revised the Bhāgavata, Vyāsa taught it to his son, Śukadeva, a soul who loved to dwell in solitude.

The Question about Śukadeva

Here Śaunaka interrupts with a natural wonder. Śukadeva was already established in the Self, indifferent to everything of this world, delighting only in his own soul. Why, then, would such a fully satisfied sage take the trouble to master so vast a book?

Sūta answers with one of the most beloved verses of the whole Bhāgavata — the *ātmārāma* verse. Even those sages who rejoice in the Self alone, whose every knot of ignorance has already been cut, render loving, motiveless devotion to Lord Hari; for such are His wondrous qualities that they draw even the liberated.

आत्मारामाश्च मुनयो निर्ग्रन्था अप्युरुक्रमे ।

कुर्वन्त्यहैतुकीं भक्तिमित्यम्भूतगुणो हरिः ॥ १० ॥

ātmārāmāś ca munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame kurvanty ahaitukīm bhaktim ittham-bhūta-guṇo hariḥ

Meaning: Even self-satisfied sages, freed from every bondage, offer unmotivated devotion to the Lord of mighty deeds — for such are the qualities of Śrī Hari. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 10)

It was so with Śukadeva, son of Bādarāyaṇa and dear to the devotees of Viṣṇu: his mind captivated by the excellences of Śrī Hari, he studied this great chronicle every day.

The Prelude to Parīkṣit's Story

Now Sūta turns to the history that the rest of this Canto will unfold. He promises to tell of the birth, the deeds and the deliverance of the royal sage Parīkṣit, and of the passing of the sons of Pāṇḍu — for these serve as the prelude to the story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. To reach Parīkṣit, we must first return to the last, terrible hours of the great war.

The Night-Crime of Aśvatthāmā

When the warriors of both armies had fallen like heroes, and Duryodhana lay with his thigh shattered by Bhīma's mace, Aśvatthāmā, the son of Droṇa, committed a deed of darkness. In the dead of night he crept into the camp and severed the heads of the five sleeping sons of Draupadī, carrying them to the dying Duryodhana as a gift he imagined would please his master. But the act was so odious that even Duryodhana was revolted, and the whole world would condemn it.



Draupadi, her eyes blinded with tears, weeps at the news that her sleeping sons have been slain; Arjuna vows to bring the head of their killer (verses 15-16).

When the news of the slaughter reached Draupadī, she wept bitterly, her eyes blinded with tears. Arjuna, seeking to comfort her, made a solemn vow: only when he had cut off the head of that fallen brāhmaṇa with the arrows of his Gāṇḍīva bow, and laid it before her, would her tears be wiped away — then she might set her foot upon it and bathe after the cremation of her sons.

Arjuna's Pursuit and the Brahmāstra

Consoling his wife, Arjuna put on his armour, took up his fierce bow, and — with Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself as his friend and charioteer, riding beneath the monkey-bannered chariot — set out in pursuit. Seeing Arjuna rushing upon him, Aśvatthāmā, already sick at heart, fled for his life as far as his chariot would carry him, as the sun-god once fled before the wrath of Rudra.

When his horses tired and no protector remained, the son of Droṇa turned in desperation to the *brahmāstra*, the missile presided over by Brahmā, as his only hope of escape. Though he did not know how to withdraw the weapon once released, he sipped water, fixed it to his bow, and loosed it. A fierce flame blazed forth and spread on every side.



Cornered and unable to flee, Ashwatthama releases the blazing brahmastra, whose fire spreads on every side as Arjuna turns to Krishna (verses 19-21).

Arjuna's Prayer to the Lord

Seeing his life in peril, Arjuna turned to Kṛṣṇa and prayed.

कृष्ण कृष्ण महाबाहो भक्तानामभयङ्कर ।
त्वमेको दह्यमानानामपवर्गोऽसि संसृतेः ॥ २२ ॥

kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahā-bāho bhaktānām abhayaṅkara tvam eko dahyamānānām apavargo 'si saṁsṛteḥ

Meaning: “Kṛṣṇa, O mighty-armed Kṛṣṇa, remover of Your devotees’ fear! You alone are the deliverer of those who burn in the fire of worldly existence.” (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 22)

He glorified the Lord as God Himself, the Primal Person beyond all matter, who by His own wisdom stands ever in His absolute being; who bestows righteousness and every blessing upon the soul bewildered by His Māyā; whose descent into the world lightens the earth’s burden and gives His devotees an object of constant meditation. Then, in all humility, he confessed that he did not know what this all-consuming flame was, nor from where it had come.

The Two Missiles Withdrawn

The Lord replied that this was the brahmāstra released by Aśvatthāmā in his extremity, and that the young man knew no way to call it back. No other weapon could overpower it; only a counter-brahmāstra could quench it, and Arjuna — expert in arms — must release one. Reverently Arjuna sipped water, circled the Lord, and fitted his own brahmāstra to

meet the first. The two flames, wrapped in arrows, joined and swelled until they filled the heavens like the twin fires of universal dissolution, and the whole world feared the end had come. Then, seeing the people's terror and the danger to all the worlds, and with Kṛṣṇa's approval, Arjuna withdrew both missiles.

The Captive and the Test

Arjuna then seized the son of Kṛpī, his eyes red with rage, and bound him with rope like a sacrificial animal to lead him to the camp. But the lotus-eyed Lord spoke, as if in anger, testing him:

मैनं पार्थर्हसि त्रातुं ब्रह्मबन्धुमिमं जहि ।

योऽसावनागसः सुप्तानवधीन्निशि बालकान् ॥ ३५ ॥

mainaṁ pāṛthārhasi trātuṁ brahma-bandhum imaṁ jahi yo 'śāv anāgasah suptān avadhīn niśi bālakān

Meaning: “O Arjuna, you should not spare this fallen brāhmaṇa. Kill him — for he slew innocent boys as they slept in the night.” (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 35)

A righteous man, Kṛṣṇa said, would never slay one who is drunk, off guard, insane, asleep, a child, terrified, or fallen at his feet — nor a woman. Yet to put an end to a merciless wretch who lives by destroying others is truly to do him good, for otherwise he would only sink deeper by repeating his crimes. And Kṛṣṇa reminded Arjuna of the vow he had made to Draupadī within his own hearing.

Draupadī's Compassion

Yet Arjuna, urged by the very Lord who was testing his righteousness, could not bring himself to kill the son of his own teacher, Droṇa. He brought the bound captive back to the camp and showed him to Draupadī, who had been grieving all the while for her murdered sons. And here the chapter reaches its tender heart.



Draupadī gazes at the bound son of her sons' killer and, tender by nature, bows to him and pleads that a brahmana be released (verses 42-43).

Looking upon Aśvatthāmā — brought in like a bound beast, his face cast down in shame — Draupadī, tender by nature, was moved to compassion for the very man who had wronged her, and she bowed to him.

तथाहृतं पशुवत् पाशबद्धमवाङ्मुखं कर्मजुगुप्सितेन ।
निरीक्ष्य कृष्णापकृतं गुरोः सुतं वामस्वभावा कृपया ननाम च ॥ ४२ ॥

tathāhṛtaṁ paśuvat pāśa-baddham avāṇ-mukhaṁ karma-jugupsitena nirīkṣya kṛṣṇāpakṛtaṁ guroḥ sutam vāma-svabhāva kṛpayā nanāma ca

Meaning: Seeing the teacher's son brought bound like an animal, his face lowered by his loathsome deed, the gentle-natured Draupadī, moved by compassion, bowed to him. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 42)

She could not bear to see him in bonds. “Release him, release him,” she said, “for he is a brāhmaṇa, worthy of our reverence.” It was through the grace of his father Droṇa, she reminded them, that Arjuna had learned the whole science of archery; and it was Droṇa himself who now lived on in his son. Let the family of one's own teacher never suffer at the hands of the pious. And she spoke a word of a mother's fellow-feeling that no mother could resist:

मा रोदीदस्य जननी गौतमी पतिदेवता ।
यथाहं मृतवत्सार्ता रोदिम्यश्रुमुखी मुहुः ॥ ४७ ॥

mā rodid asya jananī gautamī pati-devatā yathāhaṁ mṛta-vatsārtā rodimy aśru-mukhī muhuḥ

Meaning: “Let not his mother Gautamī, devoted to her husband, weep again and again as I now weep, tortured by the loss of my children.” (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 47)

The Wisdom of the Middle Path

Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Dharma, welcomed the queen's words, which were compassionate, guileless, impartial and noble. Nakula and Sahadeva, Sātyaki, Arjuna, Lord Kṛṣṇa himself, and all the men and women present endorsed what she said. Only Bhīma dissented, insisting that one who had slaughtered sleeping boys for no gain deserved nothing but death. Between the queen's mercy and Bhīma's justice, Kṛṣṇa looked into the face of his friend and, as if smiling, spoke the resolving word:

श्रीभगवानुवाच

ब्रह्मबन्धुर्न हन्तव्य आततायी वधार्हणः ।

मयैवोभयमाम्नातं परिपाह्यनुशासनम् ॥ ५३ ॥

कुरु प्रतिश्रुतं सत्यं यत्तत्सान्त्वयता प्रियाम् ।

प्रियं च भीमसेनस्य पाञ्चाल्या मह्यमेव च ॥ ५४ ॥

śrī-bhagavān uvāca brahma-bandhur na hantavya ātatāyī vadhārhaṇaḥ mayai vibhayam āmnātaṁ paripāhy anuśāsanam

kuru pratiśrutaṁ satyaṁ yat tat sāntvayatā priyām priyaṁ ca bhīmasenasya pāñcālyā mahyam eva ca

Meaning: A mere kinsman of a brāhmaṇa should not be slain — but one who turns aggressor forfeits that protection, for both these rulings come down in the scriptures and must be honoured. Keep the vow you gave your grieving wife, yet let it also satisfy Bhīmasena's demand, and please Me as well. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verses 53–54)

Both teachings — mercy for a brāhmaṇa's unworthy kin, and justice against the aggressor — stand together in the scriptures, the Lord said; therefore Arjuna must honour his promise to Draupadī, content Bhīma, and please the Lord himself, all at once.

The Just Punishment

Arjuna understood the Lord's mind in an instant.

अर्जुनः सहसाज्ञाय हरेर्हार्दमथासिना ।

मणिं जहार मूर्धन्यं द्विजस्य सहमूर्धजम् ॥ ५५ ॥

arjunaḥ sahasājñāya harer hārdam athāsinā maṇim jahāra mūrdhanyaṁ dvijasya saha-mūrdhajam

Meaning: Instantly grasping the mind of Śrī Hari, Arjuna with his sword cut away the gem upon the brāhmaṇa's head, together with his hair. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 55)

Shorn of the gem that was his glory, stripped of his splendour, Aśvatthāmā was loosed from his bonds and driven out of the camp. For, as the scripture explains, shaving the head, seizing the property, and banishment from one's place — this is the form of capital punishment ordained for a fallen brāhmaṇa; there is no other bodily death prescribed for him. Justice was done, the vow was kept, and yet no brāhmaṇa's blood was shed.

वपनं द्रविणादानं स्थानान्निर्यापणं तथा ।

एष हि ब्रह्मबन्धूनां वधो नान्योऽस्ति दैहिकः ॥ ५७ ॥

vapanam draviṇādānam sthānān niryāpaṇam tathā eṣa hi brahma-bandhūnām vadho nānyo 'sti daihikaḥ

Meaning: Shaving the head, forfeiting the wealth, and banishment from one's place — this alone is the bodily “death” prescribed for a fallen brāhmaṇa; there is no other. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 57)

Then the sons of Pāṇḍu, together with Draupadī — herself called Kṛṣṇā — all stricken with grief for their slain children, performed the cremation and the funeral rites for their departed kin.

पुत्रशोकातुराः सर्वे पाण्डवाः सह कृष्णया ।

स्वानां मृतानां यत्कृत्यं चक्रुर्निरर्हणादिकम् ॥ ५८ ॥

putra-śokāturāḥ sarve pāṇḍavāḥ saha kṛṣṇayā svānām mṛtānām yat kṛtyam cakrur nirharanādikam

Meaning: The Pāṇḍavas, together with Draupadī, all afflicted with grief for their sons, performed the cremation and other funeral rites for their departed kin. (Canto 1, Chapter 7, verse 58)

Principal Teachings

1. Devotion is the direct cure for the soul's suffering. Vyāsa composed the Bhāgavata after seeing, in meditation, that bhakti-yoga is the *direct* remedy for the miseries born of Māyā (verse 6). The whole chapter rests on this foundation: not ritual alone, not speculation, but loving devotion frees the heart.
2. Merely hearing awakens devotion. Verse 7 promises that simply hearing this scripture kindles a devotion that drives away grief, delusion and fear. This is why the Bhāgavata is meant to be heard, again and again.
3. Even the liberated serve the Lord. The ātmārāma verse (verse 10) reveals that the Lord's qualities are so captivating that even fully self-satisfied sages render motiveless devotion. Bhakti is not a step below liberation but its very flower.
4. Turn to the Lord in every peril. When the brahmāstra threatened all, Arjuna did not rely on his own famous prowess but cried out to Kṛṣṇa (verse 22). The devotee's first refuge is the Lord.
5. Righteousness holds mercy and justice together. Draupadī's compassion and Bhīma's demand for justice were both honoured through Kṛṣṇa's wisdom. True dharma is not the triumph of one virtue over another but their reconciliation under divine guidance.

Devotional Reflection

The most astonishing figure in this chapter is Draupadī. She had every reason for rage: her five sons murdered in their sleep, their killer bound before her. And yet, gazing at the man who had shattered her heart, she bowed. Her grief did not harden into hatred; it softened into fellow-feeling for another mother who might soon weep as she wept. This is what devotion does to a soul — it widens the heart until even an enemy's sorrow becomes one's own. Beside her stands Arjuna, torn between his vow and his reverence for his teacher's family, and above them both stands Kṛṣṇa, who resolves the tangle not by cancelling any duty but by fulfilling them all at once. We are shown that the spiritual life is rarely a choice between mercy and justice; more often it is the harder, humbler work of honouring both, and trusting the Lord to show us how.

Daily Devotional Practice

Today, recall one person who has wronged you, and — even if only for a moment — pray for the wellbeing of their family as Draupadī prayed for Gautamī. Then hear or read a passage of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata aloud, remembering the promise of verse 7: that such hearing itself kindles a devotion which carries away grief, delusion and fear.

Conclusion

The seventh chapter of the First Canto joins two great streams. First it reveals the sacred origin of the Bhāgavata itself: Vyāsa, seeing in meditation that devotion alone can free the suffering soul, composed this scripture and gave it to his son Śukadeva, so that all who hear it might receive a devotion that dispels grief, delusion and fear. Then it carries us to the darkest hour after the war, where the crime of Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna's blazing pursuit, Draupadī's astonishing mercy and Bhīma's cry for justice are all gathered up and resolved by the wisdom of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The fallen brāhmaṇa is punished, yet no brāhmaṇa's blood is shed; a promise is kept, mercy is honoured, and the grieving family lays its children to rest. In this weaving of tenderness and truth we glimpse the whole spirit of the Bhāgavata — that the Supreme Lord guides His devotees through every sorrow toward pure love.

May the divine wisdom of Srimad Bhagavatam awaken pure devotion within our hearts.

Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

Jay Shree Madhav.

References and Attribution

Primary edition: Gita Press, Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa (English, Complete), Book One, Discourse VII (verses 1–58), pages 83–88.

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